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THE

NINE DAYS WONDER.

A Novel. 1082

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

MRS. MEEKE,

AUTHOR OF

THE OLD WIFE AND YOUNG HUSBAND, AMAZEMENT, &c. &c.

You have worth
Richly enamell'd with modesty.

RANDOLPH.

. . . .

I see those who are lifted highest on
The hill of Honour, are nearest to the
Blasts of envious Fortune.

FORD.

VOL. II.

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MAHARAJA SERFOGI'S SARASWATI MAHAL ✱ THE TANJORE
1082

THE

NINE DAYS' WONDER.

CHAP. I.

FULLY prepared for our hero's disordered appearance, Mrs. Ashby felt only joy when he entered Wildham's Hall, where she gave him the meeting, glorying in his late noble, disinterested behaviour; as neither she nor Wildham, who were setting up for him, had had the least idea, till the footman's arrival, of the danger that had threatened the town of ———.

Lord Stanmore wished his young friend to have retired immediately, and Mrs. Ashby seconded the motion: but he complained of drought, observing that Captain Munford's cordial had not washed all the dirt and dust he had swallowed, down his throat; therefore, requesting Wildham would make some negus, and referring his mother to the Marquis and Mr. Fenwick for the particulars of his night's adventure, he ran upstairs, promising to join them again in a few minutes, and to bring the history of his *heroic deeds* to a conclusion.

During his absence, the gentlemen, as he had desired, related all they knew, and had learned from the spectators respecting his conduct, which they loudly applauded, while Wildham hastily prepared a bowl of negus, sandwiches, &c. &c.; and had scarcely performed his task, ere Ferdinand joined the party in his *robe de chambre*, when having taken his seat, and requested the gentlemen

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gentlemen would, *sans ceremonie*, partake of what was set out, he, at their and his mother's joint request, hastily recapitulated every thing that had occurred from his quitting the ball-room; protesting that he still smelt the *fragrant odour* of the coverings that had preserved the warehouses, acknowledging that he had felt it a real luxury to change his linen, and wash off some of the dirt he had picked up during his bustle.—That the Marquis of Stanmore could easily believe; blaming him, in common with Mr. Fenwick, for having so incautiously and so hastily exposed himself to the risk he had run.

"Had I waited, in the first instance, to deliberate," he replied, "I do not think my exertions would have been of much avail; for, had I allowed myself even a minute to reflect upon the probable danger I might incur, the lives of the two women would, I am convinced, have fallen a sacrifice to my timidity. I am there-

fore very happy, upon reflection, that I did not bestow a thought upon myself; but I am convinced it is impossible for any man or woman to say how they would, or rather ought to act in a similar situation; though if we do but follow the impulse of our heart, I think we should seldom act wrong. However, believe me, I take no merit to myself, for what good I did do, was done almost before I knew what I was about, though I felt very anxious to stop the progress of the flames; and being very ably seconded, I was fortunate enough to succeed: and if I had the farther advantage," speaking in a droll tone, his looks giving strength to his meaning, "to make a friend of Mr. Milford, you must think I have been amply rewarded for my exertions, though I have my doubts whether the Colonel will pardon my officious zeal:" repeating the studied speech the Merchant had made him, with such ludicrous comments upon the visible struggle he under-

underwent between his pride and his gratitude, that the Marquis and Fenwick reluctantly took their leave of him, not chusing to keep him up any longer, hoping to see him the next day, as unconscious of apparent inconvenience from his humane endeavours, as he seemed to be then: and finding himself inclined to sleep, our hero retired the moment they were gone.

Mrs. Ashby and Wildham followed his example, after separately offering up the most fervent prayers for his future preservation. Mr. Burton meanwhile remained watching the expiring fire, as long as there was a spark to be seen; while the populace were anxiously seeking the jewels which Ferdinand had lost, simply prompted by their wish to oblige him, as they one and all declared they would accept of no reward, should they be so fortunate as to meet with them, lest the brave gentleman should think they were actuated by their

love of money. Burton gave them infinite credit for their disinterestedness, hinting they would be no losers with so generous a man.

Convinced, however, that there was no longer any thing to be feared for his timber-yards, he at last turned his steps towards home, and spent the remainder of the night in laying plans with his wife, how they could best make the great man some amends; for they were far more ready than Milford to do him justice, particularly when they reflected upon the many thousands they would indubitably have lost, had not their good genius conducted Ferdinand to the spot in the very nick of time: therefore an effort, they agreed, ought to be made, to convince him of their gratitude.

The Mayor at first proposed making good the jewels, if they were not found. His wife asked him if he was mad. She, and

and various other ladies she mentioned, had had his hat in their hands while he was dancing, and they had persuaded Mrs. Hesham to ask Lord Stanmore what the *pompoon* which confined the cockade, was worth; and he had said, as near as he could guess, about twelve hundred pounds.

"Twelve hundred pounds!" repeated the Mayor: "then, faith, he has made a pretty night's work of it, if 'tis lost! I hope 'twill be found. Milford has offered a famous reward; and I left the mob moving every stone in search of it, as they are cunning enough to think they shall get more by carrying it at once to the real owner, than by taking Milford's bribe. But our thinking of replacing that bauble is out of the question; indeed, it would cost us a considerable sum, even were the Corporation to join in the purchase. So suppose I present him with the freedom of the town. I shall

have all the honour of that gift; and though he was born here, if he is not Tom Ashby's son, he has not a vote for the borough."

"No, certainly," replied his wife; "and this will be tickling his vanity at no expence; though I suppose, upon second thoughts, it must be given him in a gold box. However, the Corporation must all join in the purchase; so it will not fall very heavy upon us."

"I shall hear what my brethren say to that," rejoined his Worship, "as they must be consulted upon the occasion; because it would be proper we should wait upon him in a body, which will be an additional cheap compliment."

This point being finally settled, as soon as he had breakfasted, Burton waited upon Milford, who was the senior Alderman, to mention his intentions.

The

The more the Merchant had heard of the danger to which Ferdinand had exposed himself to preserve his warehouses, which his porters had not failed to report to him even in exaggerated terms, the more he felt discontented with himself, wishing, like the Mayor, to display his gratitude, though in a far more expensive style; and yet fearful of offending his darling son (who could hardly bear to hear even the name of Ferdinand mentioned), he was very much puzzled how to act; one minute resolving to replace the lost diamonds, of which he had learned no tidings, with others of double their value; the next thinking our hero had only been properly punished for his carelessness; and, at all events, it was possible, as his son suspected, that they were not of any real intrinsic value.

He nevertheless agreed to the propriety of presenting the young man with the freedom of ————; not that he enter-

tained any doubt, he told Burton, of his being the deceased Ashby's son; but since, by some strange chance, he now represented the King of Spain, there was something due to his official situation and to his late laudable exertions in the behalf of themselves and others; promising in consequence to attend, if he called a meeting of the other Aldermen.

But the Mayor was scarcely gone, before he reflected that he ought to have insisted upon a gold box being sent for from London to hold the *precious* manuscript;—then again this would be only making Ferdinand a present, in common with a vast many more. No, he would give him some jewels, if his own were not forthcoming; so the Mayor might arrange the other matter as he thought proper. He should give every body to understand he was passive upon the occasion.

Colonel

Colonel Milford, upon whose account they always made a late breakfast, was informed of what was in agitation during that meal; and he thought the *present* fully adequate to Ferdinand's meritorious services, whose *diamonds*, as he had predicted the over-night, were purposely lost. Though he acknowledged he did not like to be in the upstart fellow's debt, still he could not bear the thoughts of replacing the button and loop; but he would endeavour to think of something which might remind him of his former poverty: when, having finished his meal, he hastened to Mr. Fenwick's, to pay his respects to Miss Deloraine, anxious to hear the opinion of the party assembled there, respecting our hero's conduct; while his father went to the Town Hall, in consequence of a message from the Mayor, where it was agreed, *nem. con.* to present the freedom of the ancient Borough of ——— to his Excellency the Marquis Almaviva.

Some of the Aldermen suggested the propriety of presenting it in a gold box; but the Mayor thought the greater the expedition, the greater the compliment: and as even one of heart of oak could not be made at a moment's notice, for fear the Marquis should be suddenly called to town, they ought not to delay their purpose. One o'clock was therefore appointed to wait upon his Excellency in form, when Mr. Milford hinted the necessity of requesting that his Lordship would himself appoint when he chose to receive them. The Town-clerk was therefore dispatched with a proper message to that effect, of the Merchant's dictating.

Our hero, though it was some time past one, was not up when the messenger arrived, having, by a very comfortable sleep, amply made up for his late fatigues. Mrs. Ashby was very loth to have him disturbed; yet not knowing what message to return the *august Assembly*, who were

waiting

waiting at the Hall, she sent Gonsalvo upstairs with it.

Not very well pleased at being woke out of a pleasant slumber, Ferdinand wondered why the Corporation had taken it into their heads to break his rest, when he presumed they wished to return him thanks for not having suffered their town to be burned down: he therefore returned them a polite answer, purporting his wishes to see them about two o'clock; rising for that purpose, after sending Catherine word, whom he expected, and requesting she would have plenty of cake and morning wines ready for the scarlet gowns. He was still at his toilet, when one of his servants knocked at the door, to let him know Captain Munford was below, and requested to see his Lordship.

"Shew him up here," said Ferdinand.

The person who had presented him with the

the brandy over night, therefore soon made his appearance; and, after making many excuses for having taken the liberty to wait upon his Lordship, said he should not have made so bold as to have asked to see him, if it had not been to oblige honest John Glenton, who was ready to fall down and worship him, for having saved his poor old mother and daughter, who would certainly have perished but for his Lordship, since no one else would ever have thought, if they had been strong enough, of breaking a hole through the floor.

"But this is not all, your Honour," continued he. "The worthy fellow, who you may suppose, was busier than any body in searching the rubbish, had the good fortune to light upon this," untying a large silk handkerchief, and displaying the dirty singed hat, to which the button and loop remained affixed, "which he understood you lost; so, notwithstanding Mr.

Mr. Milford had offered any body twenty guineas who should bring it to him, he thought the least he could do, was to return it to your Honour *gratis*; when it occurred to him that this might be offending his old master, upon whom he may still have in some measure to depend. Yet scorning to take his bribe after what you had done for him, why he came to me, and asked me to bring your Honour the hat, as if I had found it, not himself; 'cause else it might seem as if he expected to be paid for his trouble, when, as he truly says, he shall never be out of your debt as it is. And I consented to oblige him, my Lord, though I should be ashamed of taking any merit to myself in the business.

"Ferdinand was much more flattered by the disinterested gratitude of the poor Constable, than by the expected visit from the Corporation. Therefore, after expressing his thanks to Captain Munford in

terms exactly calculated to suit the meridian of his ideas, he requested he would present John Glenton with a hundred pound note, by way of repairing his losses; hinting his intention of waiting upon all those who had lent their blankets, to settle with them according to promise.

"The Captain was profuse in his acknowledgments, assuring him that it would be a very seasonable relief to the Constable; as Mr. Milford had not an hour since discharged him out of his yard, as a *small* punishment for his mother and daughter's carelessness.

"But I ought also to tell your Honour, that he has ordered every one who furnished blankets, to go to his counting house, where they are to be paid every just demand they can make upon him; for he has prohibited them, under pain of his everlasting displeasure, from receiving any thing from your Lordship, because you have had trouble enough, he said, without

out paying them for having merely done their duty. However, your Honour will have their blessings, though he had their thanks.

"Mr. Milford was no doubt actuated by very proper motives, Captain; still what he has done, does not at all exonerate me from performing my promises: therefore if that gentleman has prohibited his dependants from receiving money, I must get you to replace the damaged blankets. In the meanwhile, give this trifle to Glenton's mother, and tell her son I will request Sir Henry Deloraine to use his interest with the Merchant, to induce him to take him again into his employ.

"Then may the Almighty give your Honour happiness in this world, and in that to come! say I;" respectfully taking his leave, very much gratified by our hero's promise to look in upon him during the day. Gonsalvo accompanied him down; and having received

received a hint from his master, made him drink a tumbler of Sherry to Ferdinand's health before he departed; which he had scarcely done, before the Body Corporate, preceded by their inferior officers, made their appearance; and the Mayor and Aldermen being admitted into the parlour, the freedom of ——— was presented by them, and most graciously received by the astonished Ferdinand, who, having requested them to sit down, gave orders for the refreshments to be produced:—and as neither Mr. Milford's nor the Mayor's cellars contained better wine than what was now handed about, which our hero had sent Wildham from London, the Aldermen thought themselves amply repaid for the trouble they had taken to adorn for their visit.

The over-night's fire of course afforded them ample subject for discourse; every one trying to say something expressive of their

their gratitude to his Excellency (as they all styled him), for having averted the dreadful calamity which had threatened ———. These compliments were succeeded by lamentations for the irreparable loss they understood he had sustained.

Ferdinand seized the opportunity to mention his jewels having been restored to him, and by whom.

"Then I can only say Munford is a very officious fellow," replied Milford; "as he must know that I had desired they might be brought to me—nay, that I even offered a reward for that purpose, professedly to prevent your Excellency from being put to any expence: and I should have thought that Munford was poor enough to have made it his interest to court my favour."

"Which I cannot suppose he has forfeited by his disinterestedness, Mr. Milford," replied our hero; "for I give you my honour,

honour, he has hitherto merely received my thanks in return for the jewels; and, I can assure you, he gave you every credit due to your generous promises, appearing to think that he had no right to avail himself of your proffered bounty."

"As your Excellency states the matter, I cannot feel myself offended; though he ought to have consulted me, before he presumed to act in opposition to my wishes: for no one can be more grateful than myself for your last night's kind exertions, though positively much more upon my neighbours' account, than my own: because, immense as would have been my loss, I should have sustained no very material injury."

Ferdinand with difficulty forbore smiling at this vain-boasting, and certainly not absolute matter of fact declaration.

"You know best, neighbour Milford," obtruded the Mayor. "To be sure, a few hundred

hundred thousands are of little comparative value to you:—but I am not so forward in the world; nor do I scruple to say that, but for the noble Marquis, I should not have been now possibly worth a shilling."

The last-mentioned noble personage was, however, by no means sorry when they, having exhausted their whole stock of compliments, rose to depart, as he was anxious to pay his respects to his fair partner; and to convince the Marquis of Stanmore and Mr. Fenwick, who had sent during the morning, to enquire after his health, that he had suffered no inconvenience from his late fatigue.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

DURING Ferdinand's engagement with the Body Corporate, the extraordinary services he had rendered the town of ——— were being warmly canvassed at Mr. Fenwick's, whither, it may be remembered, Colonel Milford bent his steps the moment he had breakfasted; and that gentleman freely declared that he saw nothing particularly praiseworthy in what appeared to have made such an impression upon Lady Ossulston, who had started the subject.

"Chance,"

"Chance," he proceeded, "had directed the Marquis Almaviva to the relief of Glenton's mother and daughter, which he, or any other person, would have been equally anxious to have saved. What else he had done, if he had been rightly informed, appeared to him to have been the impulse of rash insanity, and more deserving of censure than praise.

"There is certainly an irrational contempt of danger which approaches nearly to the folly, if not the guilt of suicide," observed Mr. Fenwick; "but I do not conceive that the Marquis Almaviva deserved censure for risking his own life in defence of a fellow-creature."

"Surely the exact reverse, my dear Sir," cried Lady Ossulston; "though such rashness as he displayed, is sure to be condemned by those who would not dare to evince the same magnanimity and disregard of self; still, I must own, I least expected to have heard Colonel

Milford

Milford censure efforts, which have proved of such material benefit to his father."

"Positively, Lady Ossulston, you wilfully misunderstand me; for though to us it would have been of little or no moment, had the fire been suffered to exhaust its fury upon my father's warehouses, Mr. Burton would probably have been ruined. I am therefore truly happy its progress was so timely checked, and am very ready to give the gentleman you so warmly defend, every credit for his interference; notwithstanding, I must still *presume* to think he displayed much more rashness than prudence; because, admitting he did suppose himself wiser than other people, he might have contented himself with giving orders, without making himself so unnecessarily busy."

"I cannot agree with you, Colonel," said the Marquis; "for I am convinced my young friend knew himself to be perfectly equal to every thing he undertook for the general safety; and there are not

many

many men who possess his powers, admitting them to be animated by the same zeal; therefore Heaven forbid that any timorous suggestions should repress the courage and spirit of enterprise he has twice evinced, when called upon to display them."

"But have you yet to learn, Marquis," rejoined Mr. Fenwick, "that whoever rises above those who once thought themselves their superiors, is sure to have many malevolent gazers at his eminence. The Marquis Almaviva has had the temerity to do much more than was required of him; he has therefore rendered himself an object of envy; he has, besides, had the additional misfortune to confer a very great obligation upon Mr.—I do not venture to add, Colonel—Milford; and few people give due credit to such actions, because they fancy it is acknowledging their own inferiority; they are consequently not contented with undervaluing the favours they have received, but even wish to render others as ungrateful as themselves."

"Why, my dear Fenwick, you are positively eloquent in this brave knight-errant's cause; if, as I suppose, he wished to make himself popular, he seems perfectly to have succeeded. However, I will readily subscribe to every thing you say in his favour, though I flatter myself I could have rendered the town of ——— the same service, without putting myself upon a footing with my father's porters, or having wrapped myself in frouzy rugs, or even handled such disgusting things, which he certainly did, chiefly for the sake of being remarked; though no man who had been brought up a gentleman, could have borne the effluvia arising from the smoking blankets, much less have suffered them to have come in contact with their skin. But Nature will assert her sway; and I can suppose the Marquis Almaviva felt himself much more at home, than he seemed to do at the Assembly."

"Then fortunate indeed it was for the poor souls he saved," said Lady Ossulston, "that

"that his olfactory nerves are not so delicate as your's, Colonel; since your *antipathy* to frouzy smells would indubitably have obliged you to suffer them to perish. I have known many people, who, being unwilling to acknowledge themselves cowards, veil so many terrors under that convenient word *antipathy*, that they have multiplied to such a degree, they have at last become as burthensome to themselves, as they had long been contemptible to others."

"I stand corrected, fair lady," replied the Colonel, in a sarcastic tone, "since I find you consider it as a species of treason not to offer incense at the shrine of your *demi-god*, as you, if my memory does not deceive me, styled the Marquis Almaviva."

"And to-day, Colonel, I shall omit the *demi*, when talking of him."

The very man was at that moment announced, who had taken Munford's in

his way, to whom he had made a noble present, and had commissioned him to present five guineas a-piece to every family whose blankets had assisted in extinguishing the fire.

Mr. Fenwick received him with open arms, nor was Lady Ossulston's welcome less flattering; when, by way of reinstating himself in the good opinion of every one present, conscious that he had spoken his real sentiments too freely, Colonel Milford addressed him in a strain of hyperbolical compliments upon his late exertions: but unfortunately the expression of his countenance by no means coincided with what he said.

"I deserve neither fine speeches, nor *even your thanks* for what I did, Colonel, since I acted from the impulse of the moment. Possibly you fancy, because chance has ingrafted me among the class of patricians, that I displayed a vast deal of

of superfluous humanity; whereas, had I remained Ferdinand Ashby, you would probably, and indeed with justice, have conceived I had done no more than my duty."

"You are perfectly right, Marquis," said Mr. Fenwick; "though, believe me, no one more fully appreciates the merit of your late conduct: still I think it a great discouragement to the lower classes, that the same actions performed by different persons, produce such different effects."

"True, my dear Sir," replied Lady Ossulston; "but the lower classes very seldom deserve either excess of praise or excess of blame; as they, like Colonel Milford, are never rash, and of that you stand accused, Marquis."

"I plead guilty to the charge, my fair accuser, as I am, upon sober reflection, inclined to believe I unnecessarily exposed myself, in spite of repeated cautions; and if I had not fallen upon a bed, I might have had reason to repent my folly;"

folly;" ludicrously relating the circumstance.

"I am only astonished the various disagreeable odours proceeding from such a couch, did not incapacitate you from seeking your safety in flight," rejoined Lady Ossulston. "Colonel Milford declares they would have made him—nay, his father's warehouses must have been consumed, had he been requested to handle the frouzy blankets which preserved them."

Our hero merely smiled expressively, while the Colonel affected to laugh very heartily; and after entering into a few more details, and receiving the tribute of applause so much his due, which from Lady Ossulston's lips was truly flattering, Ferdinand rose to take his leave; when Mr. Fenwick, seconded by Lord Stanmore, pressed him so much to return and dine with them, that he readily accepted the

flattered

invitation; Lady Ossulston adding that she flattered herself he would have no objection to accompanying them to the play in the evening, where he could not fail of being amused, since to him a set of strolling players would at least have novelty to recommend them.

As he walked home, blessings might truly be said to follow his steps; the lower classes in particular now considering him in the light of their guardian angel, and being all ready to pay him that homage virtue is ever sure to meet with.

Mrs. Hesham had not, it may be supposed, been idle—indeed, she had not been in bed, so anxious had she been to obtain minute intelligence upon the spot, concerning the fire. Mr. Milford's generosity towards those who had supplied the blankets, was already, by her zeal, propagated all over the town. Nor was our hero's munificence a secret

by the time he left Mr. Fenwick's; and ever anxious to be a party concerned in whatever was going forward, she had dodged him home, on purpose to assail him with compliments.

Never had Colonel Milford been so dissatisfied with himself, and every one about him. It certainly was a most mortifying circumstance, to find himself, notwithstanding he wore the most becoming regimental in England, in addition to the title of Colonel, a very handsome figure, and half a million of money, totally overlooked in the presence of a fellow who might have been reckoned, he said, a second Irish giant, and in whom he could see nothing but his assurance to admire: because, forsooth, this Anglo-Spaniard bore a title, by what right it might be difficult to prove, and sported a few baubles; though how men of real rank could consider him as their equal, was to him incom-

incomprehensible, as, in his opinion, he was, and ever would remain Tom Ashby's son. His every action bore the stamp of his low origin; besides, would a man of real rank put up with Wildham's accommodations?—No, no, if he had money, he would enjoy more luxuries. And what was title without fortune? Though he was never perhaps so truly convinced of the impotence of riches, as while he was thus soliloquizing; for he now found they did not even confer distinction upon him in this his native place; or rather, he discovered that they were insufficient to raise him above the boy whom his father had, by his mistaken charity, thus enabled to rival his son.

He was more than once tempted to leave ——— and its stupid, undiscerning inhabitants, to admire their *salamander* (as he now termed Ferdinand), at their leisure. But then would not that appear to be

acknowledging his mortification? Besides, Miss Deloraine was now at ——— ; not that he cared three pins, except in an interested view, whether he ever addressed her by his name. But Lady Ossulston would triumph in his departure, which he well knew she would attribute to the true cause.

He must therefore prepare to meet the object of his aversion at Fenwick's, and even condescend to treat him with some degree of civility; else he knew their host would be very capable of shewing him the door, even in the middle of dinner. And this conviction effectually prevented him from breaking in upon the hilarity of the party; nay, he felt himself so exhilarated by the repeated bumpers he drank, to banish his chagrin, that, before the ladies retired, he was become very tolerable company.

Lady

Lady Ossulston proposed their adjourning to the play, instead of separating; alledging that if once the gentlemen were left to their bottles, they would forget their engagement.

"Surely your Ladyship does not mean to sit out the whole performance?—Our places will be kept; and I think we shall have enough of Jane Shore, even in the last act."

"To you, Colonel, who have seen plays in abundance, I can suppose they afford but little amusement," rejoined Ferdinand; "but to me, who have spent the last ten years in Mexico, where, except we turned actors ourselves, we had no such entertainments, even Jane Shore will be a treat, though I cannot suppose the performers assembled here, are of the first celebrity."

"Oh wretchedly the reverse!" cried the Colonel. "But I was thinking, ladies and gentlemen, of making the strolling beings perform once for the benefit of

those who were at all sufferers by the fire. I will defray the expences of the house; and it will be the means of enabling every one to contribute towards their relief, in whatever proportion they chuse."

"I give you infinite credit for your bright thought, Colonel," said Lady Ossulston; "but since you are so generously inclined, I am sure you will rejoice to be informed that John Glenton's losses have already been amply made up to him, and that every other sufferer, if such they may be termed, has been also remembered by the very person who saved their lives as well as their houses. Nevertheless, as John (certainly very innocently on his part), has incurred Mr. Milford's displeasure, and may be reduced to some straights, I approve of your notion, though I think I could improve upon it. His Excellency has been telling us that in Mexico the nobility and gentry turn actors for their own amusement. Suppose we do the same for the benefit of the Glentons

and

and the poor in general. I am of opinion we shall draw together a far more crowded audience than the poor strollers now here."

"Undoubtedly!" cried Fenwick; "I strongly second your Ladyship's motion. Let the box-tickets be half-guineas, and fill the rest of the house at five shillings the seat; allowing every one to make what addition they chuse to the proposed prices, as charity or vanity prompts them, no matter which, so long as the poor are but ultimately benefited."

Lord Stanmore also agreed that it was likely to turn out a very beneficial thing to the poorer classes; therefore volunteered his services as a performer, if they would allot him a suitable character. Mr. Fenwick professed equal readiness; nor was Sir Henry Deloraine one of the least pleased with the idea: so what was first mentioned in joke, was now canvassed in earnest. Lady Ossulston was convinced Colonel Milford

Milford could not object to taking a part in a scheme arising from his own benevolence.

"Surely not!" cried Miss Deloraine, anxious to convince him that she approved of the idea; "and I will undertake any thing but a fine lady."

The Colonel could not object to any thing that met Miss Deloraine's approbation, though he feared he should prove but a poor substitute for the strollers they were to replace.

"We none of us aim at acquiring immortality by our theatrical attempt," rejoined Lady Ossulston; "of course you, gentlemen, will not be expected to rival Kemble or Lewis, nor we females to excel Mrs. Siddons or Jordan; we will all do our best to answer the desired end. So all that remains to be done, is to fix upon a proper play, that we may commence our studies."

"Then

"Then I am ready to undertake any part but that of a fine gentleman," was the Colonel's reply, in imitation of his fair mistress.

"Ridiculous!" cried her Ladyship. "But pray mention a play, Fanny, that you think likely to suit us all, and our purpose."

"What say you to 'The Wonder?'" said Miss Deloraine.

"An excellent old play!" observed several of the gentlemen.

"Then, in honour of our sex, it shall be 'The Wonder,' said Lady Ossulston. "Your Excellency, as far the most competent to enact the Spanish, or rather Portuguese hero, we look up to for Felix. Colonel Milford will delight the audience in Colonel Briton. Uncle, you and Mr. Fenwick must take the old Dons. Wildham is rather too old for Lissardo, else I know he would do justice to the part."

"Bravo, niece!" cried Lord Stanmore; "you are resolved to keep us to our word."

"I positively dare not accept your Ladyship's challenge," said our hero. "To succeed the great Roscius is much too arduous a task for me; besides, I am convinced Colonel Milford will do the character more justice; and I should prefer Colonel Briton or Lissardo."

"And I decline Violante," said Miss Deloraine.

"I shall find it a difficult task to please you all, I perceive," rejoined Lady Ossulston. "However, I will take upon me to retrieve the honour of our sex in the person of Violante, though I own I am fearful I shall be tempted to box my jealous lover's ears."

Whether the Colonel dreaded her putting her threats into execution, or whether he wished to pique her, we cannot pretend to say; but he absolutely declined under-

undertaking Felix, alledging his being totally unprovided with a proper dress for the character, and the impossibility of procuring one at ———; for he could not bear the idea of having recourse to the wardrobe belonging to the players they intended to supersede.

Ferdinand, at the same time, assuring her Ladyship his late objections merely arose from his diffidence of his abilities, appeared pleased at chance having thus condemned them to be lovers.

Miss Deloraine chose Isabella; and some other ladies and gentlemen were fixed upon to fill up the other parts, who readily consented to the proposal; and the fourth day, from the time every thing was finally arranged, was fixed upon for the exhibition.

Mr. Fenwick thought they ought to have allowed themselves a week to study their

their parts.—By that time, Lady Ossulston alledged, the town would be thin of company, and many of the performers might be called away.

Our hero, who gained ground hourly in the esteem of his new acquaintances, spent great part of these four days, as well as the Colonel, at Mr. Fenwick's, where they had agreed to meet for the private rehearsals, before a general one took place at the theatre; while the town's-people and gentry of the environs, who were delighted with the idea, when it was made public, anxious to display their benevolence, bought up all the box-tickets at twice the price affixed to them, many doubling and trebling that sum; and the five shilling tickets were all paid for in gold.

The members gave their proposed public breakfast, which the Corporation followed up by a concert, not to mention continual private parties.

Mr.

Mr. Milford had, it may be remembered, made a sort of vow never to set down to table at his own house with the young fellow, whom he almost, in opposition to his better judgment, affected to despise, notwithstanding the recent services he had rendered him. Yet, not to join, at least in appearance, in the public hilarity, would, he feared, subject him to general reproach, considering what a gainer he had been by our hero's exertions: indeed, but for the awe in which he stood of his son and heir, he would have been far more inclined to acknowledge his errors, and to have sought the friendship of him he was forced, upon serious reflection, and when alone, to admire. He was, in consequence, exceedingly puzzled how to proceed; he had never forfeited his word, which was one of his continual boasts, as he generally took care to introduce into every conversation, 'that his word was his bond;' though no one disputed his merit in that particular, and which, in a man of business, was very praiseworthy.

worthy. He was, however, rather unexpectedly relieved, while in this perplexing dilemma, by his greatest rival in point of consequence—namely, Mr. Burton; who, when he did take it into his head to treat his friends (which we must acknowledge was but very seldom), always vied with the Merchant in point of luxury and magnificence. And certain it was, that he had a vast quantity of plate, which had long excited Mr. Milford's envy, though he possessed nearly as much more, and of a far more fashionable make:—indeed, he was frequently at a loss how to display it all, even during his greatest treats; still it was very provoking to know that the timber-merchant had as much as could possibly be brought into use, when he entertained his friends. Therefore the great man often found that—

"While in heaps his wealth ascends,
"He was not of his wish possess'd.
"Still there was something wanting to make him blessed."

Indeed,

Indeed, since the arrival of our hero, he had, as well as the Colonel, been bitterly convinced that wealth alone cannot confer greatness, and that people may enjoy abundance, and be absurdly luxurious, without deriving pleasure from either source; for both himself and his son were indolent without ease, and rendered querulous, and impatient of contradiction by those very riches upon which they founded their pretensions to superiority: as wealth has never been found either to quicken the discernment, enlarge the capacity, or elevate the imagination, though the flattery it obtains, frequently lulls diligence, confirms stupidity, and hardens, as in the present case, its possessors in error.

But to return to our tale. Milford happened accidentally to call upon Burton during his increasing perplexity respecting our hero; and found him busily employed in making out a list of the company

pany he intended to invite to a dinner on the day preceding that on which the comedy was to be performed.

The Merchant instantly conceived the idea of turning his Worship's intention to his own advantage; resolving to give a dinner on the same day, as the Mayor merely gave him a hint, in very covered terms, of his intention, entering into no details.

Milford therefore hastened home to give similar orders, as if totally ignorant of Burton's plan; so while the timber-merchant's cards were being distributed in one part of the town, Milford's were in another; though he took care to allow the Marquis Almaviva to receive his rival's first, not doubting his accepting the Mayor's invitation, and putting a negative upon his request, in which case he should get off with honour—nay, he might even affect to feel offended at the

great

great man's not coming to his house, in preference to waiting upon the Mayor.

Thus was a sort of farce acted previous to the play; for he was inexorable to Burton's entreaties when he learned his intentions to postpone his *fête*, alledging "they should both have plenty of company."

The Mayor, however, soon triumphed over his richer opponent, when he found he had secured Ferdinand and all Mr. Fenwick's guests; as the majority of the Aldermen made a point of meeting his Excellency, wondering, like Burton, at Milford's persisting in the idea of entertaining his friends on a day when all the principal people in the town and county were engaged elsewhere.

Never, perhaps, had Burton felt his heart so open. His wines, he knew, from having more age than Milford's, were of

a superior quality; and this once he resolved to surpass him in every other respect. He therefore sent off one of his clerks post haste to London, with a list of every delicacy in season which was not to be procured at ———, and which he was to have purchased at any price by the head-cook at the London Tavern, whom he was, if possible, to engage to return with him: at all events, he was to bring somebody of his recommendation; and the first confectioner in town was to furnish the dessert, &c. &c.

Every thing succeeded even beyond the magistrate's expectations. The great man himself, it being the dead time of the year, came down; and the dinner was certainly in the first style of luxury and elegance. The wines were not less worthy of praise; and all the company seemed so perfectly satisfied, that Mrs. Burton, in the fulness of her heart, after her guests had taken their leave, declared Mr. Milford would never

never hold up his head again as he had done, as she had taken care to secure the only person likely to recapitulate every dish at their table, and to magnify mole-hills into mountains.

We need hardly add that this was no other than Mrs. Hesham, who was to the full as much puzzled as Milford had been, when she received invitations from the contending parties. Convinced, however, that she should this once fare better at the Mayor's, she reconciled the Milfords to her dining there, by assuring them she would bring them an accurate account of every dish upon the table, and of every thing that passed.

As a further proof of the inefficacy of wealth, never perhaps were the Milfords more completely mortified than by the partial success of their very wise plan; for they had merely been able to engage a few inferior people, some of whom visibly

regretted having been in a manner compelled to refuse the Mayor's invitation; indeed, he did not treat his guests by any means in the same splendid style his Worship was enabled to do upon this memorable occasion.

Mrs. Ashby, it ought to have been observed, invariably refused every invitation to leave home, conscious that she should place her son in a very disagreeable predicament, as she must take the *pas* of many people who had long thought her their inferior. She, besides, preferred a life of seclusion to one of bustle; and she had even forbearance to declare her intention of staying at home on the evening Ferdinand was expected, as Felix, to dazzle all the inhabitants of ———. Indeed her conduct evinced a very superior mind, which had neither been completely depressed by poverty, nor absurdly elevated by returning prosperity, and met with general approbation from the discerning

cerning few, capable of appreciating her motives.

Milford had, however, no idea of appearing great, unconnected with his capability of spending vast sums of money; therefore, by way of regaining that superiority he fancied he had lost, he issued a kind of general invitation to a public tea party, ball, and cold collation the evening after the play, upon which occasion he resolved to outdo Burton's futile attempt to rival him; besides, as the company were to have no regular supper, they would sit down in turn, and thus exonerate him from taking a place at the same table with Ferdinand.

To what puerile ideas does a little mind lead a man!—for Milford, when most endeavouring to preserve his boasted superiority, was, in fact, taking every sure means to render himself contemptible in the opinion of every sensible person.

CHAP. III.

THE performers dined by agreement at Mr. Fenwick's, on the day appointed for their public appearance. Every one had taken great pains to be perfect in their respective parts, and to be habited according to the character they represented. A London masquerade warehouse supplied most of the gentlemen, who had made no alteration in the parts allotted them, except that Mr. Fenwick had chosen that of Frederic, and Wildham obtained great praise in Lissardo.

Colonel

Colonel Milford sported a most elegant suit of regimentals. He was nevertheless entirely eclipsed by Felix, who had sent Gonsalvo to London, for a dress made according to his own directions, in the exact ancient Spanish costume, to which he added his various orders in jewels. Never, therefore, had he appeared to greater advantage, nor had the hero of the piece been more properly represented.

The ladies dressed Violante and Isabella as they thought most becoming. Every one, however, deserved, and met with general approbation. Never did Lady Ossulston exert herself more to please, nor never perhaps had she succeeded so well; and Felix made so excellent a lover, that they carried off the palm. The play, in short, went on with infinite *eclat* till the fifth act, when the Colonel appeared to take delight in making Felix believe Violante was not of spotless fame, as he even attempted to strengthen some of the

 surmises,

surmises, evidently endeavouring to give Ferdinand reason to suppose he had been upon too familiar terms with the young widow.

Our hero guessed his despicable meaning, and felt exceedingly angry at his seizing such an opportunity thus basely to traduce Lady Ossulston's fame, whose vivacity and natural playfulness having given full force to her black eyes, he began to have his doubts whether he was not in earnest become her lover, and of her honour he did not entertain the slightest doubt. He in consequence retorted to the fop's malicious insinuations with more severity than he was absolutely aware of, as he gave more emphasis than perhaps was required to these words—"Whoever tries to traduce the fame of Violante, and refuses to give his reason for it, is a villain!"—Nor did he very mildly desire him to draw, while he displayed his own glittering weapon, which, had he been in any other

other place, he would have laid upon the back of the vain, boasting coxcomb, who, putting his hand upon his sword, retorted, not absolutely in character—

"That I dare draw my sword, no one will venture to doubt. Fighting, you know, is my trade, though I willingly resign my claim to any more of Violante's favours; so I shall not interfere with your *honourable* pretensions."

More angry than ever, as our hero well knew what answer he ought to have made, he was upon the point of expressing his resentment, when he reflected that fools only revenge themselves by provoking; because if they succeed, they bring you to a level with themselves. He therefore replied, in the precise words of the play—

"That he would not be imposed upon."

"Nor I be bullied," was the reply.

 Had

Had it not been for the menacing air which accompanied these words, Felix would scarcely have felt its import; but the Colonel's looks, while speaking those few words, very nearly made him break through the resolution he had so recently formed, and induced him to exclaim, with no small degree of vehemence—

"That for another similar word, he would nail him to the wall."

"Don't make yourself too sure of that, proud Spaniard," he replied, also drawing, while the provoked, though unsuspicious Felix advanced to the combat, expecting the immediate interference of Frederic; but that gentleman, who thought he had never seen our hero look to greater advantage than in a fencing attitude, was not in such a hurry to part the feigned combatants, till roused by the malicious expression of the Colonel's countenance; though he could not, or rather would not suppose he would take advantage of their situation,

situation, to display the rancour of his disposition: nor was Ferdinand at all aware of his treacherous intention, till he felt a very smart prick in the sword arm, and which would most probably have proved a wound of some consequence, had he not instantly retreated, displaying no small share of skill during a few seconds that he kept his base enemy at bay, if it might be so termed; not conceiving himself to be in a proper place to resent his antagonist's unmanly action.

Some of the ladies screamed violently, the duel appeared so natural; but the gentlemen laughed at their fears, and drowned their exclamations in their continued plaudits, not having the slightest idea of any real mischief having happened.

Felix alone had felt the smart, and was by no means inclined to make the Colonel's treachery public, being well convinced that he had purposely wounded him.

Frederic had, however, now put an end to the com*m*bat; and Felix, in conformity to his character, withdrew, merely saying, though with marked emphasis—

"You are to be found, I presume, Colonel?"

To which he replied also in character. Nor were any of those present, at all aware of their having both of them overacted their parts; Mr. Fenwick having attributed the alterations he had noticed in the dialogue, to the Colonel's want of memory.

Our hero immediately hastened to a private room with Gonsalvo, who was in waiting, where, having hastily stripped, he perceived his opponent had let him blood rather freely; but telling the frightened valet it was merely the effect of a trifling accident, he desired him to devise some speedy method of stanching the blood.

The

The room to which they had retired, was not often inhabited; and those whose province it was to clean it, were too tender-hearted, to destroy the spiders with which it abounded. A quantity of their webs, which have long been an approved styptic, was therefore applied to the wound, and bound down with a fine cambric handkerchief. This done, Ferdinand hastily redressed, and resumed his station behind the scenes, having cautioned his valet not to mention the circumstance, though he was fully resolved not to suffer the Colonel to enjoy a long triumph, as he must be aware of what he had done; indeed, he fancied he perceived a sort of exultation in his looks: still he thought he might think it necessary to make excuses. But of what nature could they be, to palliate so ungenerous an action? None could be sufficiently satisfactory. He was therefore resolved to convince the dastardly fellow that he could handle either a sword or a pistol with more dexterity than himself.

Notwithstanding the hurt he had received, and the tumult of his mind, he went through the last scene with Violante better than any of the others; and the play, it may be supposed, concluded amidst the general applause of the spectators, and without the Colonel having even attempted to apologize for his *manly feat*: indeed, he internally rejoiced (having narrowly examined the point of his sword) in the idea of having drawn blood from the man he so cordially hated; for he by no means expected to be called to any account for his prowess, since Ferdinand had borne the losing blood so calmly, and indeed seemed anxious to conceal what had befallen him. At all events, should it be mentioned hereafter, it would be only affecting surprise, and placing the accident to Felix's Spanish method of fencing, by which means he should make a very honourable retreat.

As had been previously agreed, all the

performers adjourned to Mr. Fenwick's to supper, where many of the audience were also invited.

Wildham alone went home, to give Mrs. Ashby an account of the evening's entertainment. No one appeared in higher spirits than the Colonel, who gave himself infinite credit for having, as he declared, spoken more than half of his part extempore, having found it impossible to recollect the exact words; insolently appealing to Felix respecting the truth of his assertion. This was so very impertinent, that our hero could bear with him no longer: but stepping into Mr. Fenwick's library, wrote as follows:—

"Colonel Milford, your behaviour this evening, both during, and since the play, has convinced me, you cannot even be my open enemy, much less

less my friend; though the halting, as you have hitherto done, between two opinions on the matter, is both disgraceful and contemptible. But this I leave you to settle with your own feelings. I only call upon you, as a soldier, to wipe off the serious stain your honour received this evening, when you so treacherously took advantage of our situation, to wound me in the sword-arm, not accidentally, I am fully convinced, since it was doubtless a premeditated stroke, that required some dexterity, and that I should be completely off my guard.

"Had I given way to my feelings at the moment, I might possibly have been spared my present trouble; but I rejoice that I took time for reflection: and I now request you would give me the meeting, with your sword and a brace of pistols, to-morrow morning at five o'clock, behind the Rope Walk.

"I shall come equally prepared, and bring a friend, in case of accidents. You will of course take the same precaution; till when,

"I remain your's, &c.

"ALMAVIVA."

Having thus committed his thoughts to paper, he felt himself very much relieved, and soon rejoined the company, when he took the first opportunity, before they were summoned to supper, to slip his *billet-doux* into the prating fop's hand, who continued running on respecting the very judicious alterations he had made in his part. This unexpected circumstance broke in upon his torrent of nonsense; and our hero having retreated the moment he had accomplished his purpose, he was left to form his own conjectures respecting the purport of his letter.—Could it be a challenge? Where could he have wrote it?

for he had scarcely missed him. His anxiety and curiosity induced him, however, to seize the opportunity of the company being summoned to supper, to examine the contents, remaining behind for this purpose.

The style did not please him; nay, so little were his private feelings gratified, that it even affected his appetite, though he rallied his scattered spirits, and endeavoured to appear even gayer than before. But it was merely an attempt, as he was now but too well convinced that though "fighting was his trade," he had much rather let it alone; though it is very possible he would have remained rather longer in ignorance of his own deficiency in point of courage, but for the few lines which, even in his own eyes, convicted him of boasting, as he had never before had so serious a call upon his honour; and this d—d stout Spanish fellow might have fought fifty duels for any thing he knew

to

to the contrary, as many disagreeable recollections now came across him respecting his daring disposition while a boy, not to mention the recent proofs he had given of his intrepid spirit. But then how could he make an honourable retreat? Besides, if he could but rid the world of this overgrown, overbearing fellow, what a triumph he should obtain! Such a deed would establish his military fame for ever, and convince every one, that he was what he had hitherto thought himself, a man of real courage.

Such were his reflections during supper, which was scarcely removed, ere Lady Ossulston, who was more attentive to Ferdinand than she was herself aware of, told him she thought he looked pale; she was fearful he had overfatigued himself. Her first remark was certainly very just; for, owing to the tightness of the bandage, his arm grew very stiff and painful. This he did not alledge in reply; on the contrary,

trary, attributing his want of colour, of which he was not aware, to a stupid headache having come over him.

"Then let me advise your immediately retiring," she rejoined.

Several of the company seconded her motion, all politely regretting the necessity they felt of requesting him to leave the company he had so greatly contributed to amuse.

Ferdinand promised to comply with their wishes, if his complaint did not go off; but expressed great reluctance to leave so gay a party. His pallid cheeks revived the drooping spirits of the cowardly Colonel, who hoped he already began to repent of his rashness, and that dread of the consequences of the challenge had brought on this headach. He therefore almost came to a resolution to meet the *vapouring, low-born fellow,* when it occurred

to

to him, upon seeing him rest his arm upon the table, that his want of colour might arise from the pain he felt, not presuming the wound had bled much since he had been able to conceal having received it; and it was evident he had not mentioned the circumstance, and of course felt no wish to excite commiseration, which was alone sufficient to stamp him a man of courage:—then again, if he was suffering from the wound which he had so dexterously given him, he should fight him to great advantage, if he chose to decide the matter with his sword, instead of having recourse to pistols; and in the note, our hero seemed to leave the choice of weapons entirely to him. He was nevertheless very undecided how to act; when Ferdinand, fearful if he did not speedily remove his unpleasant bandage, his arm might inflame, took leave of the company, contriving to give the Colonel fully to understand he expected him to adhere to his late invitation.

This was very unpleasant, the rich man thought; for even his boasted money would not purchase courage, nor render him invulnerable; else, what would he not have given, to have procured the first, or to have been rendered the latter? But these wishes were both vain and absurd. He therefore followed him out of the room, not to arrange the mode of meeting him in the field, but to take a few turns, dark as it was, in Mr. Fenwick's garden, that he might uninterruptedly devote a few minutes to reflection; and at the expiration of a quarter of an hour, he formed a plan, which he became impatient to execute. He therefore returned to the company, who were talking of separating. No notice had been taken of his absence; but in consequence of his late resolution, he walked to the back of Miss Deloraine's chair, who was seated next Lady Ossulston, and entered into a sort of desultory conversation with both ladies for a few minutes, when, in turning from them, he

he pulled out his pocket handkerchief, and by a dexterous flirt, contrived to drop the note he had so lately received, exactly between them, while, as if unconscious of what had happened, he took rather a longer circuit than was necessary to regain his seat.

Lady Ossulston picked up the billet; and smiling at her friend, whispered—

"This is certainly intended for you, Fanny," presenting her with it.

Miss Deloraine refused to take it, saying—

"Pray return it to him; he is not aware of having dropped it."

"I am convinced he did it purposely," rejoined her Ladyship; "and if you are so incurious, that is no reason why I should be equally discreet; and doubtless he left the room to write this perhaps *chef d'œuvre* of gallantry."

"Pray

"Pray satisfy your curiosity, Eudora; for he cannot have any thing to say to me, which I should wish to conceal from your knowledge."

During this time the Colonel had resumed his seat; but had entered into such earnest discourse with his next neighbour, that he only presented a sort of profile to the ladies, purposely, Lady Ossulston was convinced, to afford them an opportunity to read his letter, which she immediately opened. The very unexpected contents rendered her cheeks in a few seconds far more pallid than those of the writer were when she remarked his want of colour; indeed, her countenance underwent so sudden a change, that Miss Deloraine put her hand upon her arm, enquiring in a whisper, what could have thus affected her. —"Hush!" was the reply, assuming a gaiety very foreign to her feelings; since, if ever she had felt the power of love, it was in favour of the elegant, and now, in her

her opinion, intrepid Felix, who had fully convinced her she possessed a heart, though she was by no means aware of the strength of her regard for him, till this letter awakened her fears for his safety. But, like the Colonel, she required time for reflection.

The company being all more or less engaged, these ladies *a-parté* were not noticed.

"May I look at that paper which seems to have so cruelly alarmed you?" asked Miss Deloraine.

"I hardly know whether I should act prudently in shewing it you, as you would certainly not only participate in my alarm, but very possibly your fears might outstrip mine."

"Now you have indeed rendered me curious. Pray give me the note."

"Then summon all your fortitude to your assistance; for if you are, as I suspect,

pect, a little touched with the *belle* passion, I shall indubitably read very clearly what passes in your heart; for you would doubtless be extremely terrified, were I even to hint that Colonel Milford is upon the eve of fighting a duel!"

"With the Marquis Almaviva?" was the reply. "Your tell-tale countenance has let me into the whole secret."

"All fancy, my dear! But I acknowledge your countenance displays more curiosity than love; nevertheless, I wish you to participate in my reasonable fears, whatever construction you may chuse to put upon my alarm: but let no one else into the secret, till we have consulted upon what steps ought to be taken to prevent matters from coming to the last extremity."

"Depend upon my discretion."

She was, however, unable to conceal her astonishment during her lecture, when, having

having concluded, she whispered in a hurried accent—

"The ladies might well scream, since it is evident the Marquis has been wounded, though he scorned to complain. How much I admire him for his forbearance! Well he might look pale. But I hope he is not much hurt. What must we do to prevent his being exposed to any farther danger? I positively begin to hate the Colonel———"

"And to love the Marquis, if I am to judge from your warmth, and the strength of your expressions."

"No, no, I feel only esteem for the brave fellow; else, believe me, I should have been more guarded in my expressions of admiration; besides, Violante has already acknowledged her love for Felix, who, were he but an Englishman, I should glory in calling my cousin: and as it is, though I shall regret our separation, the certainty I shall entertain of your happi-

ness, will reconcile me to our living so far apart."

"For Heaven's sake, what are you running on about? Is this a time to look into futurity, when I want your advice how to proceed in this very disagreeable business?—for if we do not devise some means to prevent these gentlemen meeting, in a few hours we may neither of us have an admirer to boast of, not that I mean to insinuate that Felix is to be classed among mine."

"I wish he was here to resolve that doubt; but be that as it may, they must not be allowed to fight."

"Certainly not. But how ought we to proceed, and who ought we to put into our secret? for it would be very improper to mention it publicly."

"I can't agree with you in that respect, since they ought to be obliged to keep the peace, if nothing else would prove of any avail. But proceed as you think best."

After

After a moment's pause, her Ladyship warmly resumed, glancing her eyes across the table—

"The Colonel is a coward! Felix has very properly appreciated his character; and the more I reflect, the more I am confirmed in my suspicions. The method he took to render us his confidents, and his present behaviour, are irrefragable proofs of his want of courage. He concerted this scheme on purpose to avoid a meeting with the injured Marquis. I am therefore resolved to see whether my conjectures are ill or well founded. Can you remember the contents of the note?"

"Nearly every word, I am sure."

Her Ladyship had perceived the Colonel was sedulously, and as he hoped unnoticed, watching their motions. She therefore beckoned him to her. He instantly obeyed her summons, when, having folded up the note, she presented it to him.

"You pulled that out of your pocket with your handkerchief, a few minutes ago."

Considering it with affected surprise, he exclaimed, in a much louder tone than she had addressed him—

"How could I be so careless!" his countenance expressing the greatest perturbation; adding, loud enough for every one present to hear him—"I hope you have not read it, Lady Ossulston?" well convinced in his own mind, that both she and Miss Deloraine had done so.

"Most undoubtedly I have, Colonel; as I was convinced, from the method you took to excite our curiosity, such was your wish—indeed, at first I suspected it was a *billet doux* addressed to Fanny; but she not chusing to read it, I took that trouble for her, and the contents redound so much to your honour, I would not

not let her rest till she had followed my example."

"Your Ladyship is, as usual, satirical; but I would not have dropped it for the universe!" replied the no longer undaunted Colonel.

This declaration excited general notice, and induced Mr. Fenwick to enquire what he had lost of such consequence.

"By mere accident, my good Sir, I pulled a note out of my pocket with my handkerchief, which Lady Ossulston has thought proper to read, under a mistaken notion, I must acknowledge. I hope, however, I may depend upon her discretion."

Lady Ossulston with difficulty concealed her increasing contempt; while her cousin's expressive eyes but too plainly convinced the hitherto boasting fop, that she now ranked him among the most despicable of cowards—

cowards—nay, she even made a mental vow never to place her honour and happiness in the keeping of so dastardly a wretch; while she told him, that, like her cousin, she had very little doubt of the note having been dropped for the purpose, acknowledging the contents had both surprised and alarmed her.

This declaration induced Lord Stanmore to request the matter might be explained. Lady Ossulston immediately satisfied his curiosity, to the great astonishment of every one present, who all joined in lamenting the misfortune their avowed favourite had met with, though they hoped the wound was but slight; and agreed with Lady Ossulston, that his pallid looks were perfectly accounted for. The Colonel was sure it could be nothing more than a scratch, and must have been occasioned by his Spanish mode of fencing, which they had all so much admired, as he had

not

not the slightest idea that he could have wounded him.

"Wherever his Excellency learned to fence, Colonel Milford," replied Fenwick, "I pronounce him a complete master of the science; but, unprepared as he must have been for any serious attack, it could not be expected he would be upon his guard. You might, as you declare, have wounded him unknowingly, and I hope unintentionally, though the Marquis appears to be of a different opinion. However, it is now become the duty of the Magistrates of——— to see that he meets with no farther injury. He must not be suffered to expose his life to any farther danger."

Every one present spoke to the same effect, all appearing to think the Colonel had taken, as our hero accused him of having done, a very unfair advantage of the sham fight. In vain did he endea-

vour to exonerate himself from premeditated malice, since the more he said in his own defence, the more he exposed his base disposition and real cowardice; and as he unfortunately had very few friends, and none present who could venture to defend so inglorious an action, he soon looked, as he felt, very much confused, declaring he wished he had been ten thousand miles off, before he had undertaken any character in the play.

The Marquis of Stanmore observed, such wishes were very useless now the offence was given. He himself would not have had such an occurrence take place for twenty thousand pounds; but at present it was only to be considered how this unpleasant business might be brought to an amicable issue.

The Mayor lamented that such a thing should have happened while he held the supreme power, and expatiated for some time

time upon the great precautions he had taken to prevent his Excellency from having any reason to complain of the citizens of ———; concluding by declaring he would bind both him and the Colonel over to keep the peace, as he was resolved they should not murder one another within the limits of his jurisdiction.

"Ambassadors are privileged people, my good friend," replied Lord Stanmore; "but since some means must be devised to give his Excellency satisfaction, without suffering him to expose his life, do you authorize me, Colonel Milford, to assure him you had no intention either to wound, or insult him."

Certain that he would not now be permitted to fight, the Colonel replied—

"His profession precluded the possibility of his making any concessions;

 though

though the Marquis might, if he chose, repeat what he had said respecting the matter, and that he had not been actuated by any malicious intentions; to which he might add, that he should scorn to take advantage of the Ambassador's rashness, till he was as able to handle a sword or a pistol as he was himself."

"Then, if I mistake not, Colonel Milford, you will expose yourself to the disagreeable necessity of making public, instead of private excuses to his Excellency. It will, however, be proper to let him know you are not at present in a fighting humour, nor yet inclined to acknowledge your errors; so should any unpleasant circumstances arise at any future period, you will only have yourself to blame—at all events, your's has been a most ungrateful return for the great services his Excellency has so lately rendered your father."

"Permit me to accompany you, Marquis," cried Mr. Fenwick; "I think Mr. Burton

Burton should also be of the party; because, though the Ambassador need not be required to keep the peace, he must not be permitted to expose his life in so unequal a contest. 'Tis a great chance if he has retired, as he most likely stood in need of medical assistance."

The mortified Colonel, in common with every one else, promised to wait their return, agreeing that the Ambassador ought to be made acquainted with the result of his carelessness.

Mrs. Ashby, who had supposed her son would most likely make it late, had retired before he came home. But Wildham and Gonsalvo, who was a very well-informed young man, were sitting up for him; and he had not been gone up stairs many minutes, when the gentlemen knocked at the door. Wildham was crossing the kitchen, and immediately proceeded to admit them, wondering who it could be,

and very much astonished when satisfied in that particular,

The Marquis of Stanmore explained the purport of their visit in a very few words, to the increasing amazement of the good old man, who declared he had not an idea of his guest having received any injury. He was but just retired; but as he had neither complained, nor even hinted he was wounded, he was convinced he did not intend to have any advice.

"Then we must take care he is not a greater sufferer through his own neglect," rejoined Lord Stanmore; "so shall we trouble you, Wildham, to step up with mine, and these gentlemen's compliments, and our joint request that he would admit us for a few minutes.

Wildham instantly left them; and soon returning, requested they would follow him, observing that it was but too true

his

his Excellency was wounded, as his valet was binding up his arm when he was admitted into his room, and the sleeve of the shirt he had just thrown off, as well as a handkerchief which had been bound round his arm, appeared literally to have been steeped in blood. These were, however, removed before the gentlemen reached his apartment, which was furnished with a degree of elegance none of them had been prepared to expect.

After a suitable apology, the Marquis of Stanmore informed him how they had discovered the insult he had received, with every *et cætera* likely to account for their thus intruding upon him. Ferdinand smiled at the Colonel's pusillinamity, observing that, before any man ventured to insult another, he ought to be convinced that he had courage enough to give him satisfaction, if called upon to defend himself; adding, he certainly had been

been wounded, and, as he conceived, very treacherously, by Colonel Milford.

"Then let me request you would suffer me to send for the first surgeon this place affords," said Fenwick.

"There is not the slightest necessity for my giving either him or you, my dear Sir, any trouble about the matter. Gonsalvo, who has studied surgery and physic under the Jesuits in Mexico, had prepared every thing that was necessary against my return, which he has just been applying; and except a little unusual stiffness, owing chiefly to my arm having been bound too tight, I should not be aware that any thing had befallen me; nay, by to morrow, I am convinced even that trifling inconvenience will be removed; and as a proof how very little I feel it even now, I was just going to write a few lines to your Lordship, to request you would attend me to the field of action. The Colonel has, however, taken so honourable

honourable a method to avoid meeting me, that I presume I need not rise before my usual time."

"Undoubtedly not," rejoined Lord Stanmore; "for had Colonel Milford had no other alternative, he would rather have left ——— by break of day, at the risk of fixing an indelible stain upon his character, than have given your Excellency the meeting; and I feel more than ever inclined to rejoice at his deficiency in point of courage, since I should have been very much puzzled how to shape my conduct consistently with my regard for your uncle, and my wish to oblige you. But as you are no longer in want of a second, do pray tell us how he managed to perpetrate so treacherous a deed?—'Tis wonderful we should all have been in a manner blind! I know he altered many of his speeches to his own fancy; but I attributed his so doing, solely to his want of memory; however, he has rendered himself unworthy the resent-

ment

ment of a sensible man, though I am resolved to convince both him and his father how sincerely I disapprove of his late behaviour."

" Nay, my dear Marquis," said Ferdinand, " you must exonerate Milford from any share in his son's folly."

" By no means; the old fool is wrapped up in the insolent coxcomb, and is ever ready to second or applaud whatever he either says or does; and to this mistaken encouragement I place the unwarrantable liberties his son has often taken with his superiors—indeed, their amazing wealth has rendered them only fit to associate with parasite dependants. Twenty years ago Milford was a very respectable British merchant; but his more recent acquisitions have rendered him ostentatious and overbearing, as both he and his silly son fancy that money renders its possessor a privileged man."

" Your remarks are no doubt perfectly just, Marquis," replied our hero; " but

I must

I must entreat that the little misunderstanding between me and Colonel Milford may not occasion any difference between you and his father. Had the former suffered matters to have taken their course, I flatter myself I should have been able to have given him a useful lesson. The little scratch I have received, has by no means incapacitated me from giving him the meeting; besides, had I found my right arm too stiff, I could have had recourse to my left, with which I can handle either a sword or a pistol with nearly equal facility: therefore I positively wish you would permit us to settle the matter at the appointed time. As a soldier, the Colonel must give me the meeting; and I promise you, I will take care not to deprive the British nation of so brave a defender."

"He has taken care to prevent his being suffered to give you that satisfaction which you had such an undoubted right to demand, Marquis; for, after what has passed,

passed, Mr. Burton would feel himself obliged to bind him over to keep the peace. He shall, however, make you every excuse the case requires, or I will break entirely with his family. But you have not yet told us how he contrived to display his malice; and I should wish to know whether it was a premeditated design, or whether accident co-operated with his disposition;" repeating what the Colonel had advanced in his own defence.

Our hero instantly recapitulated, in as few words as the subject would admit, every thing that had passed between him and Colonel Milford since his arrival at ———; declaring that it had been both his wish and his intention to have been upon the most friendly terms with every branch of the Milford family; nor had he yet been able to discover, as was evidently the case, why they all appeared so cordially to dislike him. This the three gentlemen found it much easier to account

account for; though they all declared his Excellency had not given the Colonel the least provocation to lead him to be guilty of so gross a breach of the laws of society."

For the present, however, they took their leave of the injured Ferdinand, hoping he would be able to enjoy a good night's rest; the Marquis of Stanmore declaring that the Colonel should make every atonement now in his power for his base behaviour, or cease to rank him among his friends.

CHAP. IV.

THE company, who were waiting the return of the mediators, as the three gentlemen might be styled, began to grow impatient ere they made their appearance; the Colonel continuing to lament his carelessness, while he secretly rejoiced in having so dexterously rendered it necessary for every one present to prevent him from meeting the object of his increasing hatred.

The Marquis of Stanmore took upon himself to repeat every thing that had passed

passed between them and Ferdinand, by no means sparing the Colonel; and dwelling very forcibly upon the serious consequences which might have resulted from his unprovoked attack, declaring that his Excellency had raised himself considerably in his esteem by the simple manner in which he had related how he had received his wound; adding, that he had been willing to wave his privilege, to give the Colonel an opportunity of removing the obloquy which must attach to his character, for having so basely taken advantage of a person so very unprepared for a serious encounter. Of this the Colonel had not chosen to avail himself; he must therefore make proper excuses during the course of the next day, indeed, the earlier the better; otherwise, as Lieutenant of the county, he (the Marquis), should find himself under the disagreeable necessity of writing to Ministers upon the occasion.

This was a very bitter alternative to a man of Colonel Milford's consequence; who for some time affected to vapour that he was a British officer, therefore would give the Ambassador the meeting when and where he chose; and as for the Mayor binding them over to keep the peace, it would not prevent them from meeting in another county.

"Then make your determination known to his Excellency," rejoined Lord Stanmore. "Depend upon it, he will make no objections to your proposal; for he assured me and these gentlemen he could handle a sword or a pistol as dexterously with his left as with his right hand."

The Colonel's countenance did not accord with his words, while he protested he would rather fight this experienced fencer in a saw-pit, than lower himself by making excuses for what no man

of

of real courage would have deemed an affront.

"That must rest with yourself, Colonel," replied Lord Stanmore; "but, at all events, I shall think it necessary to send an account of the business to the higher powers, except the Ambassador declares himself perfectly satisfied with your conduct."

Sir Henry Deloraine thought it highly incumbent that some steps should be taken, since the Colonel was so very averse to make the apology his Excellency had such a right to expect.

The proud fellow therefore found he must either atone for his malicious frolic, or set both these gentlemen at defiance; who, considering the approaching election, he did not suppose would have dared thus to dictate to a person, upon whose support so much depended, not to mention

tion his being the avowed admirer of the daughter of one, and niece of the other. Altogether their behaviour struck him as "passing strange." He thought, nevertheless, they had better not carry matters too far, lest, instead of supporting, he should oppose his father-in-law elect, and of his success he did not entertain a doubt. He therefore almost resolved to declare his intentions at every risk; as his father had not, in his opinion, acquired half a million, to render him subservient to the caprices of any great man. He must have time for reflection; he would let Lord Stanmore know his final determination in the morning.

"I will save you the trouble of pondering upon the subject, Colonel," cried the provoked Marquis, "by immediately dispatching an express to London, the return of which shall regulate mine, and, I am of opinion, your conduct."

This

This threat had its due weight, and induced the mortified Colonel to promise to meet that Nobleman and Sir Henry at Mr. Burton's, the following morning, to proceed from thence to Wildham's, upon his disagreeable errand. He was then suffered to depart with the *agreeable* consciousness of having rendered himself contemptible in the eyes of every one present. Quiet, therefore, as was his apartment, he found it impossible to sleep—nay, he even rose before his father, to whom, the moment he came down, he related every thing that had occurred the over-night, making, it may be supposed, the best of the story, and the resolutions that had been entered into in consequence, requesting his advice how to proceed. This was a favour he so very seldom did the Merchant, that we must suppose he was [illegible] impressed by such unusual condescension, when he replied—

"I am only sorry you did not run your sword through the fellow's body instead of his arm, for in that case there could only have been a bustle about it; but I positively hardly know what to advise. The company seem to have been prejudiced in favour of that interloper, who I sincerely wish had never returned hither; yet I am astonished at Lord Stanmore's permitting himself to use threats upon the occasion, instead of endeavouring to make light of what it is clear you could not avoid doing—indeed, it appears to me that he and that meddling Fenwick have been trying to widen the breach, by way of paying their court to this foreign beggar. However, he had better not be in such a hurry to write to Ministers, for fear I should follow his example; and I think Government is as likely to favour me as him, for I believe I can advance them most money upon a pinch. If it was not for your sort of engagement with Miss Deloraine, I would

set

set both him and Sir Henry at defiance at once, and then let them do their worst. You say you had no intention to wound the Ambassador, as they style him; therefore, why are you to humble yourself, to gratify any Nobleman? What need have we to care for the Lord Lieutenant, which the Marquis has thrown so often in our teeth, when we can count guineas with him, and many more such great men?"

These sentiments were so perfectly consonant to the Colonel's disposition, that he vowed, if he could but avoid making excuses to a fellow he found it impossible to fancy entitled to such a mark of respect, he should feel his mind greatly relieved.

"You make excuses to Ferdinand Ashby indeed!" replied the gratified parent; "no, no, my dear boy, never shall you so far disgrace yourself while I bear the name of Milford. I will go to Burton's in your stead, where I have no doubt

of accommodating the silly business without your farther interference. I protest I almost wish my warehouses had been burned down, rather than have laid under any obligation to the low fellow; for the town's-people are grown enthusiasts in his cause, they hardly know why."

The Colonel could only regret having dropped the challenge; had he not been so unfortunate, the nonsensical business would have been long since settled, and no doubt perfectly to his satisfaction. The Merchant had equally no doubt of his having been conqueror, had they met; yet he conceived it would have been very absurd to have given such a monster of a fellow the advantage his Herculean strength would probably have afforded him; though he would have been a rare butt to have fired at: still he did not entertain a doubt of settling the business without either sword or pistol.

There-

Therefore as soon as he had breakfasted, he waited upon the Mayor, who told him that he could not stir a step to oblige him, without the previous concurrence of the Lord Lieutenant, who affected to consider the matter in a very serious light; else there was nothing he was not ready to do, to serve so good a neighbour: while, in fact, the magistrate was secretly rejoicing in thus having an opportunity of humbling his greatest rival.

At twelve, therefore, Milford once more made his appearance at the Mayor's, where he found Lord Stanmore, Sir Henry, and Mr. Fenwick, who had already learned from Burton, what had previously passed between him and Milford, and had declared their astonishment at the Merchant's supposing he would, upon such an occasion, be permitted to represent his son, protesting they should not think themselves authorized to trouble the Ambassador, except Colonel Milford came

 forward

forward as required, and as had been agreed upon.

The Mayor was exactly of the same way of thinking, hinting, nevertheless, that the objections to his absurd proposal would come much better from his Lordship and the other gentlemen than from him, who was his neighbour, and in business, like himself.

Lord Stanmore did not require this proof to be perfectly aware of the sort of awe Milford's immense fortune created among the inhabitants of ———. In reply, he assured the Mayor, as he was not actuated by any of those prudential motives which appeared to regulate his conduct, he should speak his sentiments very freely to Mr. Milford, not standing in awe either of his riches or his power. And we must acknowledge, he strictly kept his word, even laughing at Milford's proposal of representing his son, asking whether the

the Colonel was actuated by fear or pride, in thus declining personally to atone for what he ought to have been far more ashamed of committing.

The Merchant blustered.

"The Ambassador," said he, "if such he was, must know the accident was solely to be attributed to his own awkwardness; nevertheless, he was ready, in his son's name, to express his regret for what had happened, and could not be avoided."

"So your son told you, Mr. Milford; but I maintain, he purposely wounded the *Ambassador*, whose very right to that title you so *politely* still affect to doubt: however, believe me, I shall not condescend to accompany you to the Marquis Almaviva's, as I am convinced he would consider your visit as an additional insult, instead of a peace-offering. Your son I may be inclined to attend upon the occa-

sion, admitting him to be resolved to make proper apologies."

"This is language I was not prepared to expect, my Lord Marquis," replied Milford, in an insolent tone.

"Very likely not, Sir; indeed, of late, I am of opinion you have been but little accustomed to the voice of truth; but you must be more ignorant than I am tempted to suppose, if you are so unacquainted with what is due to a man, infinitely my superior, as to imagine that he would accept even of the most abject excuses from your son through your medium, and while the Colonel is so very able to appear in person."

"Nor can I conceive why he should object to such a measure," cried Sir Henry; "since, if, as he declares, he had no intention to wound the Marquis Almaviva, he ought to be very anxious to atone for the sufferings he has so unintentionally occasioned him."

"Then

"Then give me leave to tell you, Sir Henry," retorted the Merchant, "that he shall not wait upon your favourite, if he does not chuse it, or more properly, if I do not chuse he should humble himself so unnecessarily; nor can I guess why either Lord Stanmore or yourself interfered in this silly quarrel, as I believe Colonel Milford was perfectly competent to settle the business, without requiring either your aid or advice."

"Not in an honourable way, Mr. Milford," rejoined the Marquis; "or we should certainly not have been assembled to debate upon the propriety of his atonement for his want of spirit. The insult he offered the Spanish Ambassador, was premeditated; and as he did not chuse to give him the satisfaction, as a man of honour, that Nobleman thought himself entitled to demand, though he might have had recourse to other means to humble Colonel Milford, I am resolved he shall

make proper excuses in the presence of proper people."

"Since you are so peremptory, Marquis, I will convince you that I can be equally obstinate; and I do say, nay swear, that my son shall not ask any man's pardon; so do your worst—write to Ministers, as I mean to do; and if they do not afford you any redress, why let Ferdinand Ashby, (for as such I shall consider him, till I know by what authority he assumes his present title), bring an action for damages. Colonel Milford will find no difficulty in paying any sum a jury may award him; and if you, gentlemen, think it more to your interest to pay your court to the idol of your own setting up, which you seem ready to fall down and worship, than to remain friends with me, why, you are at liberty to follow the bent of your inclinations; and since you are now fully acquainted with my final determination, I presume I may wish you a good morning."

"Your

"Your most obedient, Sir," said Lord Stanmore; while every one else appeared lost in wonder and amaze at the Merchant's language and behaviour.

"He never had an opportunity of displaying his real disposition before," continued the Marquis; "but I perceive he thinks the support he has hitherto given you, Sir Henry, entitled him to our respect under every circumstance; however, much rather had I see you not only opposed, but thrown out, than lie myself under any farther obligations to the insolent fellow. Let him propose himself, or his brave son, in your stead; but, by Heavens, he shall pay dearly for such unexampled and unprovoked language and behaviour!"

Sir Henry perfectly coincided with his brother-in-law, while Fenwick observed it was evident the Colonel had enjoyed the idea of making fools of them all.

"Yet I do think," rejoined the Baronet, "both he and his father will be sensible

 of

of their error, ere long; if I am wrong in my conjectures, I am resolved never with my consent to suffer my daughter to render us nearer related than we are at present."

"Nor even if he does read his recantation, I hope, Sir Henry," replied the Marquis, "except Fanny's heart is more set upon the match than I am aware of; in the meanwhile, however, we may as well adjourn our sitting.—Should you hear any thing from the Milfords between this and three o'clock, Mr. Burton, you will be so obliging as to let us know, and by that time I shall have decided how to proceed. The Marquis of Almaviva has certainly been led to expect an early visit from the Colonel; however, for the present, I shall keep him in ignorance of the recent occurrences, though I am going to enquire how he finds himself. But as no time was specified for Colonel Milford's visit, and his Excellency may wish to decline receiving it upon the plea of indisposition,

position, it would be absurd to trouble him with a repetition of the father's impertinence."

Mr. Burton could only acquiesce in every thing his Lordship said, who, with Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick, walked home previous to paying his intended visit, to let Lady Ossulston and Miss Deloraine know what had passed at Burton's; as they should then be able to decide, he conceived, how far the latter might approve of their breaking off the proposed connection between her and the vapouring Colonel.

Lady Ossulston remarked they had not been long enquiring how they had found his Excellency, and how the Colonel had performed the part allotted him. Lord Stanmore repeated every thing that had passed.

"Why,

"Why, Fanny," exclaimed her Ladyship, "this will not revive your declining regard for the Colonel?"

"You are very right; but I had last night, as I believe I then told you, resolved never to put my happiness into the keeping of a man, who could deliberately wound a fellow-creature wholly unprepared for so savage an attack."

Sir Henry embraced the fair speaker, assuring her he was very happy to find their opinion of the Colonel so exactly corresponded, as he should have been very sorry to have been obliged to disapprove of any man she had selected for her husband.

Lord Stanmore also expressed his approbation of his niece's determination; while Lady Ossulston gaily observed—

"Women could appreciate even the merits of their lovers, if left to themselves, and neither

neither ordered by their parents to consider them with partial eyes, nor, on the contrary, forbidden to encourage them, which alone was enough to render them enthusiasts in their cause. But did the gentlemen think this most courageous of all military men would make any further concessions?"

"Not he, truly," rejoined Fenwick. "I am sufficiently acquainted with both father and son, to be convinced they will persevere in their obstinacy; as they make it a rule to abide by any thing, however absurd, they have once determined upon."

"Then let us make our personal enquiries after the Marquis, Sir Henry. You will accompany us, Fenwick?" said Lord Stanmore.

"Suppose, uncle," added Lady Ossulston, "we take the opportunity of paying our respects to Mrs. Ashby, to whom you have promised to introduce me."

"So be it, my dear Eudora. Fenwick is already half in love with her; and I

need not tell you how difficult he is to please."

"You have indeed increased my curiosity and wish to see her, uncle."

They therefore proceeded to Wildham's; Lady Ossulston, we must acknowledge, veiling her wish to see and enquire after Felix, under the pretence of getting acquainted with his mother; who, with her son, was seated in the neat, but now handsomely furnished parlour of Wildham's small, but commodious mansion. Rather expecting to see Colonel Milford, and not wishing to excite the commiseration of those who might accompany him, Ferdinand wore his usual morning dress, though he would have found his *robe de chambre* more convenient than even an undress frock; still he assured these rather unexpected guests, a little stiffness excepted, he was not aware that any thing ailed him, and that, had he been under the slightest necessity

of

of going out, so trivial an accident would not have confined him at home. He then introduced the ladies to Mrs. Ashby, whose gentle, unassuming manners were perfectly calculated to render them almost immediately her firm friends.

Mr. Wildham was at his office, where he merely continued to do his duty till his successor was appointed, the Marquis having rendered him completely independent of his late ostentatious patron. An hour soon slipped away, when, upon Lady Ossulston's regretting that prudence forbade her inviting his Excellency to spend the evening at Mr. Fenwick's, Mrs. Ashby, with a politeness all her own, entreated her Ladyship and every one present, would, in consideration of her son's being an invalid, drink their tea with him.

Never was an invitation made with more sincerity, nor accepted with more pleasure; Lady Ossulston merely stipulating that his Excellency should receive them in his

his *robe de chambre*, as she had remarked that the pressure of his coat-sleeve increased the stiffness of which he complained. She was so warmly seconded, that Ferdinand promised to enact the *malade imaginaire* for her amusement.

They then departed; and as it was now very evident that the Milfords meant to brave the consequences of the Colonel's unpardonable behaviour, the Marquis thought it his duty, all things considered, to write a statement of facts to the gentleman then at the helm; leaving it to him to decide whether Colonel Milford ought to be obliged to make those apologies he thought due to his young friend's official character.

His letter met the approbation of the party assembled at Fenwick's, when he submitted it to their inspection, and was immediately dispatched express; while the Mayor begged to know whether he ought

to

to take any farther notice of the business, acknowledging it would be a vain attempt, were he to endeavour to bring the Milfords to their senses. There was no necessity for his farther interference, he was assured; Lord Stanmore taking upon himself to inform his Excellency upon what grounds the Milfords had chosen to act, in direct opposition to all their former friends.

CHAP. V.

NEVER, perhaps, had Lady Ossulston taken more pains respecting her personal appearance, than when going to pay this very unceremonious visit. They went early, as she observed it would be absurd to attend to etiquette, when going to visit an invalid. The first compliments being over, and Ferdinand having received the general thanks of the company for having conformed to their wishes by receiving them in his *robe de chambre*, Lord Stanmore entered into a very short detail respecting

respecting what had passed between him and Milford, acknowledging his having addressed Ministers upon the occasion.

"Then positively, Marquis, you have taken a great deal more trouble than was necessary," replied Ferdinand; "since from the moment I became convinced the Colonel was so unfit for the profession he has unfortunately chosen, I considered him as unworthy my resentment; and even to have listened to his excuses, would have rather exercised my patience. Henceforward he may therefore sleep in peace for me; though should he ever purposely insult me again, I shall take the liberty of chastising him with the only weapon a man of honour ever raises against a coward—namely, my cane; but I had much rather he would not force me to come to such disagreeable extremities, as I have a sort of habitual respect for his father, which renders

renders me very averse to wounding his feelings in the person of his son."

The company were so well pleased with each other, and with their entertainment, that the evening slipped away before they were at all aware of how the time wore; nor did they put a negative upon the request that they would stay supper, which Wildham contributed not a little to enliven; and Mrs. Ashby convinced the ladies, as she had before done the gentlemen, that she had received a liberal education, and that she had early been accustomed to move in the first circles: but her refined manners and cultivated understanding had been scarcely noticed by the very few people with whom she had hitherto associated, though she was not without her admirers among the lower classes, to whose wants she was ever ready to administer as far as laid in her power. Mr. Fenwick was, however, become an enthusiast in her cause, and appeared

appeared to consider her as a model of female excellence.

Before they retired, they all requested Ferdinand would suffer a surgeon to examine his arm in the morning, as even the most trifling wounds were sometimes rendered dangerous through neglect; besides, Lady Ossulston alledged he ought to call in a professional man, for fear the mean-spirited Colonel should hereafter deny his base attempt. Upon that plea our hero promised to comply with their wishes, and had a very hearty laugh with Wildham, after his guests were gone, at Mifford's avowed pusillanimity, which the old man prognosticated would oblige him to resign his commission, should he, as he presumed would be the case, be forced to make those concessions which at present appeared to stick so very much in his throat.

Never

Never had Mrs. Hesham been so busily engaged, she having been one of the first to discover some *fracas* had arisen between Ferdinand and the Colonel; indeed, she had more than once met, or more properly followed, our hero's valet into the laundress's, and had learned from him whatever Wildham desired him to tell her, by way of affording her a few anecdotes to retail at the various tea-tables where she made her appearance. At the play, where, owing to Mrs. Milford's having presented her with a ticket, she had been a spectatress, she had joined in the general screams, without hardly knowing why; but the valet, in consequence of his master's orders, wishing to procure something from a chemist's, applied, in preference to putting the question to Catherine, to Betty Thompson, to know where the most celebrated in ——— resided; and in the way of discourse, Betty appearing very curious, he acknowledged that his master

had

had met with a slight accident, but entered into no further explanation.

Betty being, however, convinced he must have met with this misfortune at the play, was all anxiety for Mrs. Hesham's return home, as from her she hoped to learn every thing in detail. The old gossip instantly recollected the screaming in which she had almost unconsciously joined, and naturally supposed that Ferdinand had been wounded during the mock fight. It was too late that night to have her suspicions either confirmed or refuted; but early the next morning she waited upon Mrs. Milford, from whom she learned every particular; and, finally, that the Merchant was then gone to Burton's, to endeavour to accommodate the unpleasant business.

They were still in deep discourse, the *wily* gossip drawing the unsuspecting Mrs. Milford on even to acknowledgments by

no means honourable to her son, when the great man returned in a violent rage, vowing his son should not humble to any man, even if he ranked among the first Nobles in the land, much less to Tom Ashby's son, or at most the bastard of some Spanish Grandee. The fellow would not have dared to have found himself offended, if he was not upheld by Lord Stanmore, Sir Henry Deloraine, and that whimsical, capricious fool, Fenwick.

"Would to God, Robert had seen daylight through the scoundrel!" he continued.

"Amen!" gravely ejaculated Mrs. Hesham, who thus drew his attention; and who, after a short explanation of his grievances, he even condescended to request would immediately wait upon Mrs. Burton, no matter under what pretence, but to endeavour to learn what had been decided upon after his departure; particularly recommending her not to mention where

where she had been, much less who had sent her.

Mrs. Hesham assured him he might have trusted to her discretion, since no one had his family interest more at heart—that is, while in his presence, or while she hoped to be a gainer by forwarding any of his schemes; though in the present case she was well aware, notwithstanding his very favourable statement of facts, that there had been a little foul play which did not greatly redound to the Colonel's honour; but this she kept carefully locked up in her own bosom, as she was very politely entreated to return to dinner.

To Mrs. Burton's, therefore, she hastened, where, after, as usual, swearing her to secrecy, declaring that to her alone, who was certainly the dearest and the best friend she had in the world, would she be so very communicative, she told her whence she came, repeating every word that

that had passed, even to her being dispatched "to pick her dear friend's brains;" but she scorned going so meanly to work, acknowledging she rejoiced at having left the Milfords in so glorious a stew, because, however light they might affect to make of the matter, she knew that both father and son were terrified to death.

Mrs. Burton participated in her satisfaction, and wished her to have staid dinner upon some of the remains of the late feast. She informed her of her pre-engagement, but promised to drink tea and sup with her, by which time she should have collected another budget of news.

Thus both the Burtons and Milfords became perfectly acquainted with whatever was passing at each other's houses, equally under the seal of secrecy; though it might have been supposed they were both of them sufficiently intimate with

Mrs.

Mrs. Hesham, to know what would be the natural consequence of any of them telling her any thing even in confidence. But to what mean practices will not curiosity induce people to stoop!

On the following evening, Mr. Milford was to give his projected gala. The invitations had been issued previous to the Mayor's dinner, and preparations were made for a very numerous assemblage of guests; but as the time drew near, the Merchant began to think he might have been less profuse in his orders respecting refreshments, &c. as he learned, through Mrs. Hesham's means, that the Mayor and his Lady, and many of the Aldermen intended to send their excuses under different pretences, having all, more or less, found themselves affronted that the Colonel had in a manner departed from his word.

The Merchant, in return, sent them all to the devil, though he had seldom experienced a more severe mortification; but this he endeavoured to conceal even from the lynx eyes of Mrs. Hesham, as it was too late to retract from his recent determination, else he might have endeavoured to have brought about a reconciliation, especially could it have been done without forfeiting his word, or lowering his consequence: not that the Mayor's defection gave him any serious uneasiness; but it led him to suppose, what he had rather dreaded, that none of Fenwick's guests would grace his *fête*.

"Still so near a general election, surely Sir Henry Deloraine would not dare to come to an open rupture, as he persuaded himself that it rested solely with him to nominate the Members he wished to have chosen for ———; therefore he scorned to humble to the Baronet, and resolved to let matters take their course. But having consulted

consulted his beloved son, who was even more ready than himself to set all the great men in England at defiance, it was agreed that the Colonel ought not to be the first to break off so desirable a matrimonial connection; he therefore determined to pay his accustomed visit to Miss Deloraine, when he could either play off or on, as circumstances required: because, while his fortune would enable him to pick and chuse among the daughters of the first families in England, it would be absurd in him to make any concessions to obtain this lady's hand, whose father's income, though considered as large, was not to be compared with that he one day expected to possess."

Such were his reflections as he walked to Mr. Fenwick's, where he was informed that the ladies were not at home, which he knew was a polite denial, having caught a glimpse of Lady Ossulston as he approached the door, notwithstanding she

had rather precipitately withdrawn, to avoid being seen.

He was angry with himself when he turned from the door, for not having enquired when they would be at home, and which way they were gone—a liberty he had frequently taken before; still he did not consider his present disappointment as a hint that his visits were no longer acceptable: and the Merchant thought it was only a kind of struggle to see which would first extend the olive-branch, which induced him to vow he would not flinch from his determination.

The provoked, and in some respects humbled son declared he did not care twopence for Miss Deloraine, who might have leisure to repent giving herself these airs; while his father set the whole party at defiance, averring that he could do much better without them, than they without him, as they would soon find to their

cost,

cost, which he rather supposed they were aware of, since they had not, as he expected, sent excuses for not appearing at the gala.

The invalid they did not expect, nor that he would think it worth his while to send them an apology, as they were perforce obliged to acknowledge that he had not the same reasons to wish to remain upon good terms with them, which the party at Fenwick's had; besides, his pride would induce him to stay at home, particularly as Mrs. Hesham had assured them she had seen Dr. ——— go into Wildham's just before she left home, and the great man's valet had told her his master was not so well as he had been the day before.

"He wishes to have it believed he is likely to lose his arm, I suppose," said the Colonel, "when he ought to be ashamed —at least I should—of having made such a fuss about such a trifle."

Colonel Milford had given proofs of his courage, the sarcastic gossip retorted; and, happily for her, he was silly enough to persuade himself that no suspicions of his real cowardice could attach to his late behaviour; her irony therefore to him assumed the appearance of a deserved compliment, while she laughed in her sleeve at his folly: but by way of inflicting a real mortification upon the boasting fop, whom she had long since very justly appreciated, she told him who had spent the preceding evening at Wildham's, recapitulating every dish that had appeared upon the supper table; and concluded by observing that Mr. Burton declared he had never seen a more elegant little apartment than the one the Ambassador occupied. The furniture, she presumed, for that and the parlour, had been sent from London, and had been smuggled into the house, unknown to her; not forgetting to expatiate upon various other expensive articles, which the Mayor had remarked.

"No

"No one doubted the fellow's having acquired some money," the Colonel peevishly replied. "As to the manner by which he obtained it, that, like his right to his title, might yet be questioned."

Mrs. Hesham thought it possible he might have discovered the philosopher's stone; continuing, under pretence of amusing her auditors, to torment the Milfords most unmercifully by her exaggerated accounts of the substantial luxuries with which our hero was surrounded.

The accident Ferdinand had met with, was now so generally known, that both Milford and his son were asked the particulars by many of their friends. It may be supposed they made very light of it, declaring it was entirely owing to his Excellency's awkward method of fencing; and professed themselves astonished at any

one having regarded in a serious light so very trifling an occurrence, and which the Colonel had not been able to prevent: therefore he was resolved, since no blame could attach to him, while he had the honour of bearing his Majesty's commission, never to degrade himself by making excuses to any foreigner, much less to a man, who, in his opinion, appeared in a very doubtful character.

In return, Mr. Milford's immediate dependants applauded the Colonel's spirit; who vowed he would much rather have lost twenty thousand pounds, than have dropped the note which Lady Ossulston had picked up; swearing that nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have let the fellow blood a second time.—Of his ability so to do, no one to whom he thus vapoured, chose to appear to doubt. Thus Colonel Milford hoped he deceived every one to whom he related the story. Unfortunately, however, he found it impossible to deceive himself; conscience was perpetually reminding both

his

his father and himself that they had been greatly to blame. In vain they endeavoured to persuade themselves they deserved the applause their parasites continued to feed them with;—so many other people evinced their disapprobation of this undue exertion of spirit, that they were not suffered to blind themselves to what might be the consequence of the late illiberal and unprovoked attack: indeed, many of those whose interest it was to assist in their self-delusion, despised them for listening to their suggestions.

But thus it is with those who are supposed to have it in their power to do much good or harm; either ambition or cowardice prevents many of their intimates from addressing them with sincerity. They therefore are very seldom told of their faults; and if by any accident they are awakened from the pleasant dream which leads them to fancy themselves superior mortals, Flattery is always at hand to pour in her opiates, to quiet conviction, and to stifle remorse.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

IN consequence of Mr. Milford's obstinately persevering in what he deemed a very manly line of conduct, not one half of the company invited to his gala, assembled at the Town-Hall; and those who did make their appearance, were not of sufficient note to gratify his reigning foible.

Mr. Fenwick's guests neither came, nor paid the arrogant Merchant the compliment of making the most frivolous excuse for their non-attendance; and as by this time party spirit ran high, the

Mayor

Mayor and his particular friends also staid away, and many more did the same through different motives: therefore, though there was a profusion of dainties set before those who approved of every thing Mr. Milford either said or did, and who had not in consequence sided with the contrary party, the ball was exceedingly dull; even the now unrivalled Colonel (as our hero, it may be supposed, was not among the guests), found it intolerably stupid; and instead of keeping it up till broad daylight, as many of the young people had talked of doing, by two o'clock every one departed to their respective homes, as much disappointed as their host had felt himself. Nor had the Colonel ever been more completely mortified, or so fully sensible of the want of taste and spirit of his townsmen—indeed, so much was he provoked, that he was more than once tempted to have challenged our hero (to whom he solely attributed the defection of their guests), to have met him

him with pistols, provided indeed they stood at five-and twenty paces' distance; and only wished he knew how privately to wreak his vengeance upon this his greatest enemy, being well aware that matters were not yet brought to a crisis between them.

His quiet apartment far from co-operating to compose him to sleep, rather by affording him full leisure for reflection, prevented him from reposing. Nor was his father much more at his ease; though they had both boasted, when they separated for the evening, that they cared for no man, and that they knew those who had staid away from their ball, had punished themselves much more than they had disappointed them.

It was however agreed, after a long debate between the father, mother, and son, the following morning, during breakfast, that the Colonel should call once

more

more at Mr. Fenwick's, but not before one o'clock at soonest; and if any slight concession could be made to prevent their coming to an absolute rupture with Lord Stanmore and the Deloraines, why, so be it, the Merchant observed; though he charged his beloved Robert not to humble himself too much: arranging several conciliatory speeches likely to answer the desired end, without affording these great men too much of a triumph; when Mrs. Hesham came bustling in, nearly out of breath, which very seldom happened, but she had almost run every step of the way, so great was her dread of being anticipated in the agreeable intelligence she came to communicate. She had scarcely got within the room, ere she exclaimed—

"Why, I little expected to have found you all here, good folks; though I ran all the way from home, in hopes of catching you

you before you set off for Stanmore Priory; for I presume you are going there, if not to-day, to-morrow. My Lord, Sir Henry, Lady Ossulston, Miss Deloraine, the Ambassador, nay, even Mrs. Ashby and Wildham are already gone; and Mr. and Mrs. Burton, and I can't tell you who besides, dine there on Sunday. My Lord's travelling coach came round to take up Mrs. Ashby. The Ambassador, Lady Ossulston, and Mr. Fenwick set off on horseback; and I must say his Excellency, as they style him, was mounted something like; his arm is of course better, for he seemed to have the full command of a very spirited horse. Wildham and his valet went off in his postchaise; so Catherine remains mistress of the house, and I shall take the opportunity to see the new furniture, which the maids tell Betty Thompson is not to be matched in ———."

She might have continued for half an hour longer, astonishment having totally

totally absorbed the faculties of her auditors. To be thus absolutely thrown off by these great men, in whose acquaintance he so much prided, rendered Milford nearly frantic, though he did all in his power to conceal his chagrin; and under pretence of business, soon got rid of Mrs. Hesham. He then consulted with his son what line of conduct they ought to pursue, since it was now very evident that Sir Henry had given up the idea of the proposed alliance.

The Colonel swore the Baronet's was d—d shabby behaviour, not that he regretted losing his chance of the girl; only it would afford the upstart, low fellow, to whose misrepresentation of his behaviour he placed every mortification he received, such a triumph. Then there was Lady Ossulston, whom no one could please—she would rejoice at his supposed disappointment. However, if his father had any

any spirit, they might yet repent having treated him so rudely."

"Any spirit!" retorted the angry Merchant, "why pray, Robert, when was I ever deemed deficient in that respect? I only wish you had as much; however, though, between ourselves, I am afraid you was a little to blame in that cursed rencounter, depend upon it, you shall not be insulted by any of the party with impunity."

The Colonel blustered violently upon his father's very unexpected hint; but soon found he must lower his tone, if he wished to keep the old gentleman in good humour: and he knew enough of his disposition, to be convinced that, absurdly indulgent as he had hitherto shewn himself towards him, he must not hope to render him absolutely blind to his failings; but a little acceptable flattery, and an acknowledgment that the visible encourage-

encouragement which Lady Ossulston gave our hero, had thrown him too much off his guard, once more conciliated matters between him and his fond father: indeed, Milford's greatest fault, as Ferdinand had very justly observed, was the blind complaisance he had ever evinced towards this darling son. He therefore now swore a tremendous oath that Sir Henry Deloraine should never again represent the Borough of ——, at least, during his lifetime, even if it cost him a hundred thousand pounds to throw him out.

"No, no," he continued, "my interest is pretty strong, and I am resolved you shall oppose him, Robert; and I make no doubt of bringing you into Parliament in spite of the Baronet, Lord Stanmore, and Burton, whom, it is evident, they are now buying over, in hopes he will be able to make them amends for having quarrelled with me. But let them do their worst. I shall enjoy making that old

timber-merchant's thousands fly; and Sir Henry will most probably ruin himself, should he prove obstinate."

Nothing could have been more agreeable to the humbled and revengeful Colonel than such a proposition, since he anticipated his being chosen as a matter of course; but fearing he had still a bitter pill in store, in case Ministers should pay any attention to what Lord Stanmore, it was said, had written them, he told his father that he was by no means convinced that Ministers were not imposed upon by this *pretended Ambassador:* at all events, since his party had now come to an open rupture, it would be but prudent to act upon the defensive; he therefore thought Mr. Milford ought to write his real sentiments upon the subject to the Premier. The person he had before addressed upon the business, merely saw through the eyes of greater men, and took every thing for granted which they advanced; but should

should they be able to convey any authentic intelligence to the First Lord of the Treasury, the fellow might yet be obliged to decamp, for fear of being stripped of his borrowed plumes.

The Merchant was rather averse to such a measure, considering the little success of his former letter, till he reflected that his representations might, at all events, serve to counteract the effect of what Lord Stanmore had written, as they must make his son's conduct appear much more excusable than that Nobleman had probably considered it. He in consequence wrote a very elaborate epistle to the great man, in which he omitted no circumstance likely to lower our hero in his estimation, or to raise his son's fame at the Ambassador's expence; excusing himself for thus troubling him, upon the score of wishing to extenuate the Colonel's behaviour, which he was fearful Lord Stanmore had not fairly stated in the letter, which

he

he had been informed he had dispatched to the same Right Honourable Gentleman. His task being concluded, his laborious production was sent off express that very afternoon.

The Colonel had thought of addressing some of his brother officers, but not those to whom he had written before, to the same effect; but relinquished the idea, from a fear that they might be less inclined to believe in his boasted courage, than his father's friends evinced themselves; he therefore preferred giving them a verbal account, should he ever be required to defend his conduct, to writing a relation of the *unfortunate accident* which had prevented him from giving our hero the meeting, being well aware that he should not have been able to have done justice to his feelings upon the occasion.

The rupture between the Milfords and their hitherto great friends, was soon, thanks to Mrs. Hesham's industry, the

town

town talk, with all the whys and wherefores thereunto belonging. Those who cared as little about Mr. Milford, as he affected to care about his titled friends, did not scruple to assert that it was a very shabby affair altogether, and that the Colonel ought to have fought, or to have made proper excuses.

The indefatigable gossip was particularly happy whenever she found an opportunity of tormenting either father or son; therefore never failed repeating (with well-affected astonishment at the licence some people gave their tongues), every report derogatory to the Colonel's honour; thus frequently making the Merchant feel the sensation so often experienced by the galled horse, while the more meek-spirited son affected to laugh at what he dared not seriously resent, conscious that he should be no more inclined to attend to a second, than to the first call of honour which had been made upon him. Meanwhile his father's

father's exculpatory letter had reached the person for whom it was intended, who, being already greatly exasperated against Colonel Milford, owing to the just representations of Lord Stanmore, was by no means inclined to put a favourable construction upon the feeble excuses his father made for his insolence towards a man whom national policy would have induced him to support, even if the Ambassador had not been particularly recommended to him by his uncle the Duke de L'Infantado, who had thought it necessary to give the great man a sort of summary account of his nephew's birth, &c. for fear any misrepresentations should involve him in any disagreeable predicament.

It may therefore be supposed that Colonel Milford would have been immediately required to make the most humble excuses to his Excellency, if the Minister had not considered his behaviour in so very serious a light, that he thought it

proper

proper to address the insulted person before he came to any decision. He had but just dispatched his letter to our hero, when one of the superior officers in Milford's regiment dropped in, having some business to transact with him. To him the Minister communicated the two letters he had so recently received, asking him his opinion of the Colonel's behaviour.

"Why, he has convinced me of what I have long suspected—namely, that he is a d—d coward, and therefore ought to be kicked out of the corps."

"Then I would advise your calling a meeting of his brother officers," replied the great man; "and if they are of the same way of thinking, e'en expel him from the regiment, or at least force him to sell out: for my own part, I think him a disgrace to so honourable a society."

Thus encouraged, the young Nobleman scrupled not to use all his influence with

his brother officers, who came to an immediate resolution to write their sentiments of his conduct in such terms to the Colonel, as must force him either to exculpate himself to their entire satisfaction, or to dispose of his commission. Nor did they forget to hint that the higher powers were as little inclined to shew him any favour; giving him fully to understand that, in a very short time, he would be publicly required to make the most ample excuses to the Nobleman he had so cowardly assaulted, and basely slandered through the medium of his father.

This very unpleasant letter rendered the person to whom it was addressed, all but raving mad; and most certainly had our hero been present when he received it, he would have fought him with any weapons nearest his hand, in hopes such a proceeding would have removed the stigma he found was already attached to his name. Wishing, however, to brave even the displeasure

sure of Ministers, and the contempt of the corps to which he belonged, he affected to laugh at this very flattering epistle, assuring his father, to whom he was obliged to shew it, that he had rather wished for an opportunity of relinquishing his military command, adding, he should much rather serve his country in the *senate*; and as for his having incurred the momentary anger of Ministers, rather than suffer him to join the bands of Opposition, they would dispense with his making the proposed excuses.

Nevertheless, the Merchant was both piqued with the great man, and angry with his son; though his mistaken partiality for the latter rendered him still very anxious to find excuses for his conduct, which he persuaded himself solely originated in the doubts he entertained of our hero's being the great man. Every one but themselves seemed inclined to believe him; therefore, making a merit of neces-

 sity,

sity, he affected to applaud his son's intention of writing instantly to his agent, to dispose of his commission for whatever it would fetch, upon receipt of his letter, vainly hoping he was thus displaying that quality in which he was unfortunately so very deficient; when, as if to place the Colonel above the *malice of his enemies*, and to render him of even too much consequence for Ministers to endeavour to humble him with impunity, the Parliament was, as had been expected, dissolved, which news was communicated in due form by the Mayor to the Corporation; and a general meeting of the freeholders, citizens, &c. &c. were summoned to attend at the Town-Hall the following day.

The in some respects humbled Milford felt his courage revive, while he swore his son should offer himself as a candidate, though he wished they had been

allowed

allowed a little more time; when he reflected that they should have some advantage over the late Members, if they began canvassing without delay, which they actually did within an hour after the arrival of the news, beginning by their particular friends, whom they found no difficulty in persuading to second their endeavours; indeed, they met with the most flattering success among those who dared not disoblige the Merchant, well understood, who all professed themselves ready, to a man, to bring Colonel Milford into Parliament.

It had for some time been rather supposed that the antiministerial Member, who stood with Sir Henry Deloraine, owing to his being rather advanced in years, did not mean to propose himself again to represent the ancient Borough of ———; but no one entertained an idea of the Baronet being opposed.

Such, however, they soon found was the Colonel's intention, though he did not absolutely avow this design; merely giving his friends and neighbours to understand that he stood upon his own bottom, unsupported by any party; nor did he ever mean to side with any, either in or out of the house, should he have the good fortune to be elected by the inhabitants of his native place, taking care to hint that he was not in the predicament of nine parts out of ten who got into Parliament, who, having half-ruined themselves to procure a seat, were under the necessity of accepting either a pension or a place, by way of mending their broken fortunes.—Most people are pleased by these independent boasts, though they seldom last longer than the time of election; but no one could dispute the little necessity there appeared for Colonel Milford's accepting any of the loaves and fishes in the gift of Ministers.

The

The old Representatives were nevertheless not without their friends in ——. They were consequently soon apprized of the opponent who had started against them, who, by the time the freeholders had assembled, in obedience to the Mayor's summons, had already secured the vote and interest of every person at all dependant upon his father.

His intention to dispose of his commission was, it may be supposed, for the present, kept a secret, as he entertained great hopes that Ministers, as well as his neighbours, would be too busy during the pending election, to think of obliging him, whose favour they would certainly endeavour to conciliate, to make excuses of any kind to our hero.

He therefore made his appearance at the Town Hall, surrounded by his friends, and flushed with success; and, regardless of forms, was in the midst of a very spirited,

 independent

independent harangue, when he was interrupted by the bustle which the arrival of the Marquis of Stanmore and Sir Henry Deloraine occasioned.

They were accompanied by our hero, Mr. Fenwick, and several other respectable country gentlemen, and had scarcely paid and received the compliments of the Mayor and Aldermen, bowed to the crowd, &c. before the other Member, attended by his friends, made his appearance.

Lord Stanmore was then the first to address the assembly in behalf of his relation, who, notwithstanding the powerful and unexpected opposition Colonel Milford meant to make to his claim, intended to offer himself once more to represent them in Parliament.

The Baronet followed his brother-in-law, without permitting himself the slightest reflection upon Colonel Milford's conduct, merely

merely assuring those assembled, that he had always discharged his parliamentary duties to the best of his abilities, and he trusted to their satisfaction; and should they think him worthy the continuance of their support, he would endeavour to deserve their future approbation: nevertheless, if they thought any gentleman more competent to the task, he was both ready and willing to resign all pretensions to their favour.

A vast shout of applause testified the general sense of the assembly when he ceased speaking, and "Sir Henry Deloraine for ever!" was vociferously re-echoed by most people present.—Mr. Fenwick now stepped forward to thank the freeholders for thus promising to support his friend, whose principles had been tried, therefore might be depended upon, and who had given a proof of the independence of his spirit, since he was neither a placeman nor a pensioner, though he had

already represented the Borough of ——— in three successive Parliaments; and he thought no man ought to make a boast of their independent spirit, who was at all connected with either party, and every officer was certainly in the immediate pay of Government.—" To be sure, to be sure," was repeated by Sir Henry's friends, who not being in the interest of the other Member, called out for Mr. Brentworth, a country gentleman, whom it had been in contemplation to bring forward with the Baronet; but that gentleman now told those who appeared inclined to assist him with their interest, that he expected to be nominated, without opposition, for another place, therefore of course politely declined soliciting their suffrages.—" Then let us be represented by Mr. Fenwick," cried a dozen or more, speaking together; and Mr. Fenwick was immediately loudly called upon to stand forth.

This

This truly worthy man was much too fond of a country life, to wish to become a Member of the Senate. He therefore thanked them very politely for thus wishing to bring him forward; but assured them he had no inclination to enter upon so arduous a task.

They, however, persisted in having him for a Representative, and became so clamorous in their requisitions, that our hero, who was very near him, told him he must oblige the freeholders, who were so anxious to procure him a seat in Parliament. The good man was in consequence obliged rather reluctantly to increase the number of candidates; Ferdinand, upon his declaring he was no orator, taking upon himself to return thanks for him to the assembly, which he did in such appropriate terms, that as all present considered themselves more or less indebted to him for his late exertions, not to mention the many who had participated

in

in his bounty, the hall resounded with applause between every period that he made in his discourse.

After giving them fully to understand that Mr. Fenwick would neither employ bribery nor corruption to triumph over his opponents, he requested they would recollect that his purse was always open to relieve the needy and distressed, adding—

"I should therefore be very sorry to see him expend even a guinea upon the present occasion; because it might prevent him from being so actively benevolent as he has hitherto shewn himself. Be it in consequence my task to treat my friends and fellow-citizens during this election; it being the only return I can make the Corporation for having honoured me with the freedom of this ancient Borough, to assist, at least, with my purse, in securing them honourable and independent

pendent Representatives; that when seas again divide me from the friends of my childhood, I may have the satisfaction of reflecting that neither their charters nor their liberties are in danger: as I am well convinced that Sir Henry Deloraine and Mr. Fenwick will seize every opportunity of exerting themselves for your interests, and that they will be ever warm and active in their contention for the public good. What more can or need be said to convince you of the propriety of your conduct in selecting two such men to speak your sentiments to the nation at large? Nor can I express the cordiality with which I repeat after you—" Deloraine and Fenwick for ever!"

This was triumphantly re-echoed through the hall.

The Mayor, in defiance of his more powerful neighbour, openly applauded the nomination of the Baronet and Mr. Fenwick,

Fenwick, declaring, since one of their former Representatives chose to resign his station, the latter gentleman was better calculated to succeed him than the very young gentleman who had first proposed himself.

Milford, on the contrary, affected to ridicule the idea of bringing Mr. Fenwick forward, after what that gentleman had said, who, he affirmed, was too fond of experimental farming, to have devoted much time to studying the history and laws of his country.

"Mr. Fenwick must have spent his time very unprofitably," retorted the Mayor, "if he be not rather more qualified to represent us than a boy of yesterday."

Loud plaudits succeeded this display of the Mayor's independency on the part of the Baronet's and Mr. Fenwick's friends;

friends; while the Merchant's stanch adherents called loudly upon Colonel Milford, who in consequence endeavoured to resume the speech in which he had been so unpleasantly interrupted. But he was not fortunate enough to give his opponents a very high idea of his eloquence, notwithstanding he was very profuse in his promises, and laid great stress upon the substantial benefits the town of —— had received from his father, grandfather, &c. pompously enumerating the number of people they always had in employ, &c. and anxiously labouring to convince them that, but for Mr. Milford, more than half of the inhabitants of ——— would be in a starving condition. Commerce, in short, was, according to his creed, the sole support of the British nation; and as he was the son of one of the first merchants in Great Britain, who was more proper than himself to defend their rights and charters? For who could give such good information upon the subject as his father?

father? who had more or less been the patron and protector of every freeholder in ——: pledging his honour to make it his chief study to fulfil the wishes of his constituents.

The old Member, notwithstanding his avowed wish to decline the contest, had so strong a party, that it was finally decided "they should all start fair," as the Mayor termed it; and ten days from the present one was fixed upon for opening the poll, when it would be soon seen who stood highest in the opinion of those, upon whose votes the election depended.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

MR. MILFORD and his son had no sooner left the Hall, than they ran from one public-house to another, to engross every one in ——, if possible; delivering orders at each to have open house kept for the ensuing fortnight at their expence, giving the butchers large orders for the supply of the publicans, who were desired to brew night and day, that they might be prepared for the wants of their guests, and to procure every thing that money could purchase, to gratify the populace at such a juncture; and farther, the Mer-chant

chant desired them to send to his cellars for whatever wine or liquor they might want.

Before night, therefore, nothing but drunkenness and confusion reigned in the streets of ———; and "Colonel Milford for ever!" was the general cry among those who had nothing to lose, nor any one to care for, and who had not a vote to bestow, as it was all one to them who were returned Members, so long as they could but get tipsy at free cost. Not that every publican was engaged to forward Colonel Milford's election; but as every house of entertainment was now become a rendezvous for the idle and dissolute, the town was in a state of general anarchy, very unpleasing to the more sober sort of the inhabitants.

The Mayor, who, in compliment to the Lord Lieutenant and our hero, had become the avowed supporter of Sir Henry and

and Mr. Fenwick, of course the particular opponent of Colonel Milford, chose (knowing that, let the election terminate how it would, he should be no loser), to throw open all his empty warehouses for the reception of their friends, where long tables were soon spread, and in due time covered with every thing in season, and where they were supplied with whatever liquor they chose, from porter and ale to punch and wine; and as his liquors were of the first quality, and his roast beef and plum puddings were even more tempting than any they could meet with at the houses in Milford's pay, he did not want for company.

Mr. Milford, however, continued to treat as absurd, the idea of any one's opposing his interest, openly declaring that he preferred Mr. Fenwick to the Baronet. Indeed to turn the latter out, appeared to be his chief aim, as he could by no means forgive his having broken off the projected

match

match between his daughter and the Colonel, merely, as he affirmed, to flatter and gratify the supposed Spanish Marquis.

The other old Member had his own friends, who were not less interested in his success. It was therefore rather dubious who would be together at the conclusion of the contest.

On the following day, our hero accompanied his friends during their canvassing visits; and as he had rendered himself very deservedly popular, a great many of the freeholders declared it was not in their power to deny him. It was near eleven before he returned home, after a most fatiguing day, meaning to retire immediately; having agreed, in consequence of Milford's boasts, and serious endeavours to support his son, to recommence the same plan of operations the following day, as they were convinced

that

that if money carried the day, the Merchant would outbid them even at every risk; having already dispatched agents to London, with orders to send down every freeholder resident there, in postchaises and four; and many who had taken up their abode at a still greater distance from their native place, were to be fetched in an equally expensive style.

Our hero, who was very anxious for the success of his friends, attributing the Baronet's rupture with Milford, in a great measure to that gentleman's and Lord Stanmore's regard for him, nevertheless perfectly agreed with them in rejecting even the idea of any unfair practices to obtain the desired end; not doubting that, should the Colonel be hard run, he would afford them an opportunity of setting aside his election.

This he was remarking to his mother and Wildham, when a note was brought

him, which he had no sooner perused, than hastily rising, he said—"I must step out for a few minutes," leaving the room, without entering into any farther explanation, and Mrs. Ashby and Wildham in momentary expectation of his return. But nearly an hour having elapsed, they began to wonder what could detain him, and why he had not told them where he was going. However, soon after twelve, a scrap of paper, upon which was rather scrawled than wrote with a pencil—"Do not set up for me, nor expect me till you see me," was brought in by one of the servants, who had received it at the door from a stranger, the same he believed who had brought the first note to his master. Something of moment, they presumed, must have occurred, and that he had been sent for either by the Marquis of Stanmore or some of his friends; and upon a farther enquiry respecting the person who had brought both the notes, they

they concluded him to be Mr. Fenwick's butler; and as the Marquis's return appeared very uncertain, after desiring Gonsalvo to sit up for him, they retired to bed.

But, to their great surprise, they learned he was not returned when they rose in the morning, and that he had not sent home during that interval. Having waited beyond their usual time, they therefore breakfasted without him, not doubting but they should soon see or hear from him, or, at all events, some of his friends would call, to account for his thus strangely absenting himself. But, to their increasing astonishment, Sir Henry Deloraine came in before they had finished their meal, to enquire for him, adding—"We were fearful he was indisposed, as he promised to breakfast with us at Fenwick's, at nine, or soon after."

"Good Heavens, Sir Henry!" exclaimed the alarmed Mrs. Ashby, "you amaze me!

me! We have hitherto supposed he slept, or at least spent the night at Mr. Fenwick's!"—relating when he had been sent for, and shewing him the scrap of paper which they had received from him, and which had evidently been torn from a letter.

Sir Henry wondered where he was gone, assuring Mrs. Ashby he had not the slightest idea of his being from home, but was convinced he would very speedily return, alledging many reasons in support of so natural a conclusion.

The day, however, elapsed without any tidings being received of the lost sheep; and the canvassing went on very dull without him. One or other of his friends were calling or sending to Wildham's every half hour; but were as constantly assured he had neither returned, nor sent home. They therefore grew more minute

in their enquiries, but without discovering any circumstance, to lead them even to guess where he was gone. His horses and carriage were at home, nor had he been to hire any conveyance at any of the inns, which rendered his extraordinary disappearance, for such it appeared to be at this particular juncture, the more unaccountable. He certainly had not left the town at such a time of night on foot; and if he was within its precincts, it was very extraordinary he did not devise some means of lessening the serious fears for his safety, which his mother in particular now began to entertain.

The second day, however, passed away with increasing inebrity and riot on the part of the populace, and with real anxiety on the part of our hero's friends, whose strange disappearance was by this time pretty generally known, to the no small triumph of the Merchant's party, who, becoming the echoes of the Colonel,

 declared

declared it was no more than they had long been expecting; and on the third day they did not scruple boldly to assert that he had set off, for fear of detection.

The Marquis of Stanmore was both astonished and perplexed, having on the second day after our hero's strange disappearance, received a letter from Ministers, which would have enabled him to have compelled the brave Colonel to have made the most satisfactory apologies to the insulted Ferdinand, except, indeed, he had ventured to brave the resentment of those in power at every risk, it having been the particular wish of Ministers to impede his popular triumph, which such an humiliation would certainly have most completely done.

But as matters had turned out, the Marquis was prevented from exercising the more than discretionary power with which he was entrusted; because, as he observed

observed to Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick, were he to inform the impudent fellow of what was expected from him during his Excellency's absence, it would only be exposing himself and them to the insults and ridicule of the Milford party, who would seize the opportunity of the present popular commotion, to lower their superiors to a level with themselves. It was therefore agreed to suffer the mortification they had in store for young Milford (whose disgraceful expulsion from his regiment, with various other mortifying *et cœteras*, their party were as eager to publish, as his were to arraign our hero), to lie dormant, till they obtained some intelligence respecting the still absent Ferdinand.

Day after day, however, elapsed, without any tidings being obtained of the supposed fugitive, though letters from London addressed to him, arrived daily, which was a convincing proof that he had not bent his steps thither; yet it appeared

rather a difficult undertaking to any of his friends, to address the resident Spanish Ambassador upon the subject, as they could not write to him without entering into some details, which the Marquis might not wish to have made known to that Nobleman. Was it possible that political business could have called him away so suddenly and so secretly? But then, had that been the case, he would certainly have taken some of his servants with him, and, at all events, a change of clothes.

His mother gave way to the most unbounded sorrow, being convinced that some dreadful misfortune must have befallen him. In vain did Lord Stanmore and his other friends point out to her the little likelihood they conceived of her fears being ever realized, as he must have been met with, or heard of, had any accident befallen him.

The

The Colonel's mob, inspirited by their brave commander, even in spite of old Milford's serious remonstrances, constantly paraded the streets, for the express purpose of insulting every one who did not wear their colours; and of an evening in particular, in pursuance of their *generous* protector's oblique hints, they generally assembled before Mr. Fenwick's or Wildham's doors, to shout "Colonel Milford for ever!" and to enquire for Nandy Ashby, who had hid his head in some cellar, they supposed, to keep himself out of a prison; and many *witty* hand-bills, to his prejudice, were stuck up, and distributed by the same party. Yet, as his friends observed, it was impossible to punish the delinquents, allowing they could affix the guilt upon any one in particular, till it was ascertained where the Marquis was gone; therefore to exasperate a low, drunken mob, who were supported in their insolence, would be acting very

absurdly, it being quite a lawless season among the rabble.

But during the first week of the more than unpleasant suspense which our hero's friends were doomed to undergo, a trifling check was put to the insolent Colonel's unmanly triumph; though his father declared the accident (which his opponents' partisans did not scruple to say was a judgment upon him, for having so basely scandalized the Marquis Almaviva), did not give him a moment's concern: notwithstanding, it was nothing less than the loss of a very fine new ship, which he had lately fitted out at a great expence for the Levant trade, and which had sailed for Smyrna soon after the commencement of the bustle, and had, in consequence of a most violent gale, been driven on shore upon the coast of Holland, where she had gone to pieces.

Several

Several other vessels, which had sailed at the same time, had been very great sufferers; and one in the Government service, had gone down in sight of the Robert (Mr. Milford's ship), before she was driven on shore, and every soul on board was supposed to have perished; whereas, most of Mr. Milford's men had been saved. That gentleman therefore assured his friends, when they waited upon him, to express their regret for his misfortune, that the vessels not being insured, owing to the great press of business he had had of late, had not occasioned him a moment's concern; he only regretted the loss of two of his men, who he understood had unfortunately been washed overboard when she struck. The five-and-twenty thousand pounds, at which the ship and cargo were valued, was too trifling a loss, to deprive him of an hour's rest. Now many of his opponents thought that this sum, added to the many other thousands which he was daily, nightly,

nay, hourly squandering away, might in time diminish even his immense fortune.

These surmises gained additional ground by a circumstance which occurred the very day after he had learned the loss of the Robert from part of the crew, whom the Captain had sent home in a trader, bound for ———, remaining behind himself, to endeavour to preserve at least some part of the cargo. Some gentlemen, whom both father and son had greatly provoked by their conduct, and who very justly despised them for the base aspersions the Colonel in particular was continually flinging out respecting a young Nobleman so deservedly esteemed as our hero generally was, and whose strange absence had so justly and seriously alarmed all his friends, having collected as many of the Merchant's notes as amounted to a very considerable sum, and requested all their friends to draw for what money they had in his hands, the run upon his

bank

bank became so great, and withal so sudden, that he was obliged to stop payment for a few hours, while he was raising money among his friends, to answer these very unexpected demands; not that any of those who thus perplexed him, entertained the slightest fears for their money: but it afforded them a momentary gratification in being thus enabled to mortify him, particularly to Mr. Burton, who had largely contributed to the success of their plan, and who even wished to have had the Merchant made a bankrupt: but his other tormentors being less maliciously inclined, he was permitted to rally his forces, and to do honour to every demand upon his bank the following day.

These momentary perplexities merely, as he said, amused Colonel Milford, who proudly ridiculed the idea of distressing his father, boasting that he would be able, when the election was over, to count guineas with all his adversaries. At all

events, these trifling checks, or humiliations, did not appear to affect his spirits, as he even appeared unusually elated on the day appointed for receiving the votes of the freeholders, notwithstanding Burton's repeated assurances that he would lower him a peg before the first day's poll was over. And we must acknowledge he never let his guests want for either plum-pudding, roast beef, or liquor of any kind, though he secretly regretted the prolonged absence of our hero, to whom he had principally looked up for repayment; yet, as he was convinced Lord Stanmore would make him ample amends, he continued to exert all his influence in Sir Henry's and Mr. Fenwick's favour.

Notwithstanding, even Mrs. Hesham had not been able to discover what was become of this great man; therefore, with Mrs. Milford, she agreed he had certainly absconded, for fear of detection, though to the Burtons she declared herself of a very different opinion: because, having by degrees

degrees grown very intimate with his valet, who was seriously uneasy about his master, she easily discovered that neither he nor Mrs. Ashby attributed his absence to any of those fears the Milfords affected to believe had directed his movements; besides, Gonsalvo only smiled, when she, to sound him, repeated their suspicions of his being an impostor. Therefore she concluded that time would elucidate the present impenetrable mystery more to the satisfaction of our hero's friends, than to that of his enemies.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

AT last the poll opened, and each candidate addressed the multitude The Colonel in particular made a most able speech in support of his pretensions, which his opponents did not scruple to affirm had been composed by a wiser man, he having merely learned it by heart; he was therefore styled the "Poll Parrot" by their mob; nevertheless, he obtained the majority of votes in a very short time: as, notwithstanding all Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick adduced in behalf of the absent Ferdinand, they found the lower order of

of people gave far more credit to the Colonel's assertions, who openly declared it to be his firm opinion that he would never return to ——, a mob being generally as mutable as the wind, and wholly swayed by appearances; for, as our divine bard says—

> " With every minute they do change their mind,
> " And call him noble, that was now their hate—
> " Him vile, that was their garland."

And so it fared with Ferdinand, whose friends therefore rather hurt their own cause, by persisting in their declarations in his favour:—" because, if he is a man," argued the populace, " and has done nothing he need to be ashamed of, why don't he come forward, and confute what Colonel Milford asserts?"

What they said, was very just, Sir Henry agreed; still he would pledge his honour that fear did not prevent the Marquis of Almaviva

Almaviva from appearing amongst them, though he found it utterly impossible even to conjecture what had thus induced him to withdraw himself, after having taken so active a part in the contest; but he trusted that a short time would clear up what at present certainly appeared very strange, and was peculiarly distressing to his relations and friends.

Still, notwithstanding both the Baronet and Mr. Fenwick were very much respected and beloved, at the close of the first day's poll, the Colonel was seven-and-twenty a-head. Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick had an equal number of votes, and stood next. The other old Member was much more in the background, and talked of declining giving his friends any farther trouble.

The bells rang all night, to the great annoyance of the more peaceably inclined part of the inhabitants; and both Mr.

Milford

Milford and his son paraded the streets till a very late hour, encouraging their partisans to eat and drink, and what they termed, keep it up for the honour of ———.

The poll went on nearly the same the following day, and closed with reiterated shouts of "Colonel Milford for ever, and down with all false pretenders!" that gentleman being now thirty a-head; and the next day was to close the contest, and complete his triumph. Mr. Fenwick was now five before the Baronet; therefore, in the opinion of many, the election was already decided, Sir Henry declaring he gave up all hopes; indeed, but for the persuasions of his friends, he would have withdrawn himself from the contest, as he protested he had rather Mr. Fenwick should be returned, than himself. But that worthy man, who had been forced rather against his will, to come forward, vowed he would make all his friends give

the

the Baronet plumpers the next day; declaring that if that proud, insolent, ignorant puppy had not stood first upon the list, he should have rejoiced to have been in the rear.

During their debate, the other old Member joined them, who being far more anxious to support them in opposition to the Colonel, than to be returned himself, he offered them all his interest to fling out their boasting opponent. It was therefore finally settled that that gentleman should declare his intentions to his friends the following morning on the hustings. Still the Colonel had at present so much the advantage, that the Baronet gave up all hopes of out-voting him, though he thought it by no means unlikely that he might be able to establish a charge of bribery against him, which might ultimately force him to resign his seat in the house, admitting, as he fully expected, he should be returned.

While

While the first people were thus engaged, the lower classes were making the most of their time at their various rendezvous, knowing that another evening would conclude their holiday. They were therefore more than ordinarily riotous while planning schemes for the next day; when a very handsome travelling post-chaise stopped in the middle of one of the principal streets, where great crowds were, as they styled it, keeping it up; and the postillions enquired the way to Mr. Wildham's. Had they asked for any other person, 'tis a chance whether their question would have been resolved, or whether even a look would have been bestowed upon the travellers, except curiosity had induced them to enquire for whom they were come to poll, so much were they engaged with their own concerns; but, upon hearing the name of Wildham, many of them thought it possible that this carriage might contain the very man, whose absence had occasioned

so much anxiety and speculation, and so many quarrels. One and all were therefore eager to get a peep at the travellers; but Ferdinand being personally known to most of those present, who were chiefly of the Colonel's party, they no sooner caught sight of the gentleman within the carriage, than they declared it was not Nandy Ashby.

The stranger, astonished at the insolence of their deportment, asked why they were assembled. But unfortunately his accent denoting him to be a foreigner, John Bull thought it beneath his dignity to give him the desired explanation; on the contrary, while one, more civil than the rest, was directing the postillions, the others were complimenting the enquirer with various polite appellations, such as French son of a b——, outlandish Monsieur—Mounsheer Frog, &c. &c. hoping he had brought some tidings of the would-be Ambassador.

The

The stranger took no notice of their impertinent, and to him inexplicable remarks; merely making a sign to the postillions to drive on. Two servants on horseback followed the carriage, neither of whom chose to amuse the set with their broken English, therefore affected not to understand their enquiries.

But as our hero's birth, parentage, and education, and supposed presumption in assuming a title by no means his due (if Colonel Milford were to be credited), had been continually canvassed of late, and they presumed this foreign stranger was come to bring his mother some tidings of her lost sheep, all those who could find in their hearts to leave their bottles and jugs, ran after the chaise, which proceeded slowly, the town being very badly paved; and as they took a nearer cut, a crowd was assembled by the time it reached Wildham's door, who were all impatience to see who alighted.

Mrs.

Mrs. Ashby, accustomed of late to insults from this party, was crossing the hall, when the carriage drove up;—the rattling of the wheels made her turn her head, and then fly to the door, followed by Wildham and Catherine, who, like herself, were convinced it was Ferdinand returned. The fond mother, however, outstripped them. But what were her surprise and disappointment when, having torn open the carriage door, she perceived only one gentleman within, and he a total stranger. Regardless of form or ceremony at such a moment, she hastily exclaimed—

"Where is my son? Do you bring me any tidings of my son?"

The stranger, whose astonishment during her eager, impatient enquiries, appeared even to exceed that of the disappointed mother, seemed at a loss to com-

comprehend her meaning, merely replying—"Madam!"—More alarmed than ever, Mrs. Ashby was ready to sink into the earth, and would most probably have fallen, so great was her tremor, if the scarcely less disappointed Wildham had not borne her into the house, and then hastily returned, to request the stranger would do him the favour to alight, which he did at his entreaty; but he appearing nearly as much in need of support as Mrs. Ashby, the good man caught hold of his arm, and led him in.

The surrounding crowd was not much wiser for having attended the carriage, since they dared not follow the stranger into the house; therefore, unwilling to lose their time in forming idle conjectures, they returned to their bottles with increasing avidity, by way of making up for lost time.

Mrs.

Mrs. Ashby and Wildham, though so seriously disappointed in their first expectation, now flattered themselves that their unexpected visitor, whose look and accent denoted him to be a foreigner, had brought them some intelligence respecting their beloved Ferdinand; yet they dreaded to make the enquiry, for fear they should be unpleasantly undeceived. Nor did the stranger appear more inclined to have those fears he began to entertain, realized; indeed he seemed wholly engrossed in considering Mrs. Ashby, which afforded Wildham an opportunity of regarding him unobserved.

He was a tall, stout, swarthy, handsome man, of two-and-fifty, of a lofty and commanding aspect; and though there was a sort of habitual proud expression upon his countenance, he now appeared to be contending with far softer feelings; when, making an effort, though unable to ask the question he was so

anxious to have resolved, he turned to Wildham—"Pray, Sir, what has occasioned the bustle which appears to prevail among the inhabitants of this town?"

"Oh Heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Ashby, before Wildham could reply, "'tis my brother!" sinking upon the floor while speaking.

"It is indeed your unnatural brother, my beloved Seraphina!" cried the stranger, stepping forward, and raising her in his arms, "who is come to solicit your forgiveness for his past unkindness. But the joy I feel at again seeing and embracing you, has been strangely damped."

The person whom he addressed, was unable to answer him. Wildham and Catherine were soon provided with proper restoratives, which they applied so judiciously, that in a few minutes Mrs. Ashby was sensible she was in the arms of a brother, now truly repentant for his past behaviour towards her.

Wildham therefore felt himself very cordially inclined towards the Duke de L'Infantado; though his anxiety respecting Ferdinand momentarily increased, since it was evident that his Grace knew no more respecting him than they did. The brother and sister having devoted a few seconds to their mutual feelings, Mrs. Ashby faintly articulated—

"Don't you bring me some tidings of my son? He has been missing these ten days!"

"Missing, my beloved Seraphina! You have indeed surprised me! What do you mean? I fully expected to have found him here!"

Wildham took upon him to elucidate Mrs. Ashby's meaning, producing the note they had received from the Marquis about an hour after he had left them.

"There

"There must have been some foul play," replied the Duke, after a moment's pause; "though this certainly bears some resemblance to my nephew's writing: and I can't suppose it would have been found very easy to have compelled him to have wrote even these few lines."

"Certainly not," said Wildham;—all he feared, was that they had been written for him; while the impatient mother asked her brother how long he had been in England, and what had brought him over: adding—"I had given up all hopes of being ever again reconciled to my once, nay, ever dear Philip!"

"The dear fellow, whose strange disappearance renders me extremely uneasy, has inspired me with his feelings for his beloved mother. He first brought my long-neglected, though not forgotten sister to my mind. Still I was only half a penitent for many years; that you already know. But he had no

sooner left Spain, than I wished I had accompanied him; and the death of his paternal uncle, the Duke de Medina Sidonia, to whom he is heir, and who died within the month after he left Mexico, induced me to be myself the bearer of the news to him, as he is appointed to succeed him in his Government. I rather expected to have found him in London, and I meant to have prevailed upon him to have accompanied me down hither, that he might have acted as mediator between us. But from our resident Ambassador at the Court of St. James's, I learned he was still in the country, travelling about, he presumed, since he had not answered his three last letters, though they respected the business he came over upon, and were of a nature to induce him, from not having heard from him, to be in momentary expectation of seeing him in town."

His arrival being, however, very uncertain,

tain, I left London the next morning, in hopes of meeting him upon the road, but making myself sure of finding him here. Judge, therefore, how much your looks and hasty interrogations, my dear Seraphina, when you found he was not in the carriage, alarmed me. I need not tell you, Mr. Wildham, that I am a total stranger in England, though I am assured I am even a proficient in the language; still I am very much at a loss how to proceed in this strange business. What steps ought to be taken, if my nephew does not speedily return?—as I mean to make it a national affair; for I am convinced, if there had not been some foul play at the bottom, he would never have suffered his mother to remain for such a length of time in such a painful state of suspense: he therefore must have some private and inveterate enemy."

"The Marquis, or I believe I ought, after what your Grace has been relating,

to say the Duke de Medina, has a vast number of friends and admirers in this town. As for his having either public or private enemies, I hardly know what to say. He has been greatly envied; still I cannot think there is any person so wicked, as to have made any attempt upon his life: and as to his being confined against his will, that appears still more improbable. Hitherto, his mother and friends have hoped that private political business had induced him thus strangely to absent himself, and obliged him to suffer us to remain in ignorance respecting his abode; but since he has not been in London, I am more than ever at a loss to account for his absence; nor can I presume to advise your Grace in a matter of such importance:" entering into various details respecting what had been said both before and since our hero's arrival at ——— ; even relating how he had spent his time till the evening of his abrupt departure: and

as

as both the good old man and Mrs. Ashby seemed to think he had felt a very strong predilection in favour of Lady Ossulston, his Grace eagerly enquired whether she was still at ——.

"She was in town this morning," replied Wildham, "as she called as usual upon Mrs. Ashby; and if her countenance spoke the feelings of her heart, she was very unhappy to find we continued in the same unpleasant state of suspense repecting the Duke. She hinted, if I remember right, an intention of returning to her seat in the country this evening, but talked of seeing Mrs. Ashby again in a few days.

"Altogether, this is a very strange affair," rejoined the Duke; "but I wish, my good friend, for as such I must always consider you, Mr. Wildham, that you would wait upon Lord Stanmore, and inform him and my nephew's other friends, of

my arrival, and of my wish to consult with them, how I ought to proceed to fathom this very strange mystery. The Marquis will perhaps do me the favour to return with you, as I am convinced he will upon such an occasion excuse my not paying him the first visit."

Wildham instantly set out, leaving the newly-reconciled brother and sister to lament the absence of him they both might be said to idolize.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

THE report of some stranger having arrived at Mr. Wildham's, had reached Mr. Fenwick's before the large party assembled there, had quitted the eating-parlour, and they were all more or less impatient to learn who it was—not the Marquis of Almaviva, they had been informed; but they none of them doubted his coming from that Nobleman.

Lady Ossulston and Miss Deloraine intended, as they had told Mrs. Ashby, to leave ——— that evening; and Lord Stan-

Stanmore had promised to see them safe to her Ladyship's seat, which was only six miles' distance from ———; but the moment the latter heard of the stranger's arrival at Wildham's, she resolved not to set out till she had learned what had brought him. She in consequence told her uncle, when she left him and the other gentlemen over the bottles, that as there was a moon, she thought they had better drink their tea before they left the town.

Lord Stanmore easily guessed why she wished to defer their departure, therefore readily assented to her proposition; and not feeling herself inclined to chat upon indifferent subjects to the other lady guests, under pretence of making some preparations, and giving some orders respecting her departure, she retired with Miss Deloraine to her dressing-room, where, though it was already twilight, she refused to admit lights, not wishing

to be seen anxiously watching the approach of the expected messenger from Mrs. Ashby, who she was convinced would relieve the minds of all her son's friends, the moment she herself learned any satisfactory account of the absentee.

This she was remarking to her cousin, when she perceived Wildham advancing up the street, but too slowly to denote him to be the herald of agreeable tidings. This she immediately observed, adding—"Come along, Fanny—I am resolved to know the worst at once; for I hate suspense when any of my friends are concerned: so let us give him the meeting in the hall."

They had just reached the bottom stair, when he entered.

"Well, Sir," she cried, "what news of our friend?—for I have known, more

than an hour, that you have had a gentleman at your house.".

"Then news flies quicker than I could have supposed," he replied; "since, according to my calculations, not more than half an hour has elapsed since my noble guest stopped at my door."

"Noble guest!" she repeated. "Oh tell me, dear Wildham! Never mind as to the exact time when we shall again see the Marquis of Almaviva."

"I sincerely wish I could give your Ladyship a satisfactory answer; unfortunately, that is not in my power."

Without replying, she instantly turned from him, anxious to conceal the perturbation of her spirits, which confirmed all Wildham's latent suspicions, who was a perfect judge of feelings so consonant to his own.

Miss Deloraine, who did not participate in her cousin's agitation, stopped her as she

she was hurrying away, observing Mr. Wildham had not told them who this noble guest he had mentioned, was.

"What does it signify?" retorted her Ladyship; who, unable any longer to restrain her tears, hastened away, leaving her cousin to question their joint friend, who entered into a few details, which he knew would be repeated to Lady Ossulston, and then requested to have a few minutes' private audience of the Marquis of Stanmore, who immediately joined him in Mr. Fenwick's study, and was astonished when he learned the arrival of the Duke de L'Infantado; but, understanding that his Grace did not wish either his rank or errand to remain a secret, he requested Wildham would join the party now assembled in the saloon, since the intelligence he had brought, would certainly impress them all with a wish to do every thing in their power to relieve the anxiety of his Grace and Mrs. Ashby."

Wildham

Wildham accordingly repeated every thing that had passed between him and his guest to the company at Mr. Fenwick's, who, one and all, declared themselves of the Duke's opinion, because, since that Nobleman was in ignorance of his nephew having left ——, there must have been some treachery in his unaccountable disappearance; and all wished, as matters stood, they had been less guided by delicacy, and their fears of offending the Marquis in the first instance: but vowed they would now make every effort, and offer any reward to obtain some information respecting his destiny, as it was impossible a man of so distinguished a figure should have travelled to any distance without being remarked; and if foul play had been used, more than one man must have been concerned in the business.

While, however, this point was being debated by the majority of the guests, the

Marquis

Marquis of Stanmore, Sir Henry, and Mr. Fenwick accompanied Wildham home, where his Lordship renewed his former acquaintance with the Duke de L'Infantado, and introduced his companions, as friends and admirers of his absent nephew, whose disappearance afforded them ample subject for conversation, though none of them were able to form any guess, likely to assist them in their proposed researches, which they agreed to begin the next morning in the most public manner; meaning to offer very large rewards to any one who could give them any information likely to lead to the wished-for discovery.

This the Duke proposed doing upon the hustings, when he could also enter into various details respecting his nephew, calculated to remove the prejudices the Milford party entertained against him, and to convince the inhabitants of ———, that he was, *bona fide*, the person Lord

Stan-

Stanmore had continued to assert he was. They therefore separated for that evening, after coming to this decision; the Marquis standing pledged to see his nieces home, and the Duke having many things to talk over with his sister; but he promised to breakfast the next morning at Mr. Fenwick's, and to attend that gentleman and his friends upon the hustings.

Before midnight, his Grace's arrival was very generally known, though no one had learned the real reason of his journey; indeed the lower class were too much taken up in diminishing the various election stores, knowing their days of riot were drawing to a conclusion, to care much about Wildham or his guests; and the middling people, sensible of the impossibility of satisfying their curiosity, prudently resolved (Mrs. Hesham excepted) to wait with patience the solution of these mysteries.

The

The indefatigable gossip having seen the carriage stop at her opposite neighbour's, actually had the impudence to cross the way; but meeting with Gonsalvo, who readily informed her that it had brought his master's uncle, and Mrs. Ashby's brother, the Duke de L'Infantado, she was preserved from the mortification of being turned out by Wildham, who would have been less than ever inclined to keep any measures with her. But, rendered thus wise, she hastened away to the Milfords, and had the singular good fortune to be the first to inform them of the noble Spaniard's arrival; though whether he came from his nephew, or where that gentleman had been, she had not yet learned.

Colonel Milford alone appeared surprised and chagrined by her intelligence. His father presumed the Spanish Duke was come to clear his nephew's character; but did not conceive his arrival would

prove

prove of any service to Sir Henry Deloraine; because, admitting he made it appear as clear as the sun at noon-day, that his nephew was Emperor of the moon, he did not see what that would have to do with the election:—indeed, he had often wished their party had made less free with the absentee's name, as he had never foreseen that they should the sooner compass their ends by traducing his fame; but be that as it might, there did not remain more than seventy voters to come forward on the morrow, and of those twenty-seven had been brought from a great distance at their expence, and were, he had every reason to believe, their sworn friends: of course it was absurd to suppose that Colonel Milford ran the slightest risk of not being returned.

Mrs. Hesham was, as usual, his echo, though she was well convinced that the latter gentleman did entertain some fears; but of what nature, she could not ascertain,

tain, though she thought they seemed connected with the unexpected arrival of the Spanish Grandee. She therefore took care to procure a seat at a window, which commanded an excellent view of the hustings, having learned that the stranger meant to attend the Baronet and Mr. Fenwick thither. The multitude, who had heard the same, was unusually great, in expectation of they hardly knew what.

Colonel Milford and his father were the first to make their appearance among the assembly; and the former gentleman was warmly expressing his gratitude, &c. when the three other candidates, the Marquis of Stanmore, and the stranger appeared in sight, and occasioned a general cry of —"Here they come! here they come!" not very grateful to the Colonel's ears, it was presumed; as he certainly lost great part of his colour, as well as the thread of his discourse, which induced some of the friends of his opponents to swear they should

should make him tremble at last, while others called out "they hoped he would be done, after all his bribery."—Whatever might be the Colonel's feelings, or whatever fears he might entertain, certain it is that he appeared unusually agitated, while he stammered out a few incoherent sentences which no one present understood.

The Duke and his party having ascended the hustings, and his Grace having, by Lord Stanmore's desire, taken his station to his right, he bowed three distinct times to the surrounding multitude, who were silent to a man, perceiving he was going to speak, both the Marquis and Sir Henry having intimated as much by their gestures; and after a moment's pause, his Grace began—

"Gentlemen, Burgesses, and Freeholders of ———, being a total stranger in the kingdom of Great Britain, consequently

quently unknown in this ancient and respectable Borough, where I only arrived late last night, it may be thought taking too great a liberty, particularly at such a moment, even to attempt to withdraw your attention, though but for a very short time, from the serious object you have in view; as I am aware that you are here assembled to chuse the Representatives who are to transmit your sentiments to your gracious Monarch, and to watch over your privileges, liberties, and laws. I can therefore conceive what must be the anxiety of every individual, while thus delegating so truly sacred and important a trust into other hands; which rendering me fearful of trespassing too much upon your patience, I requested the kind friends who surround me, to make my sentiments and wishes known to you, fearful I should not be able in my broken English, to make myself clearly understood; but they encouraged me to make my meditated appeal to your feel-

ings

ings in my own words: and I own this nation is so renowned for its integrity, impartiality, and honesty, that I feel the less reluctance to enter upon my arduous task. May I therefore construe your present obliging silence into a permission to enter upon my subject, in which I am particularly interested, and in which I cannot help fancying the honour of the citizens of ——— is in some measure concerned."

"Proceed! proceed!" was re-echoed by the crowd, his Grace having paused to allow them to express their sentiments; which being thus ascertained, he continued as follows in the next chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

"TO make myself at all clear, I must enter into various details respecting my family; I shall therefore not lengthen my tale by apologizing for what it is impossible to avoid. My father was the late Duke de L'Infantado, by birth of course a Spaniard; and at his death, that title devolved to me, his only son, though he had also a daughter, who has for nearly thirty years past, resided amongst you."

Here his Grace's narrative was broke in upon by Colonel Milford, who, contrary to

to his father's wishes, chose to interrupt him by calling out—"Open the poll! You can then, good people, if you feel at all interested in the promised story, hear what this gentleman has farther to say."

"Aye, aye," cried one of his most stanch adherents, "let us proceed to business;—let the gentleman, be he a Duke, or no Duke, speak when the business of the day is over."

The Marquis of Stanmore instantly stepped forward.

"Gentlemen, will you thus tamely suffer a Nobleman of the first consequence and distinction, to be thus insolently interrupted, when addressing you by your own consent and desire? Surely not.—At present his Grace is prepossessed in favour of our nation; let us therefore convince him that we scorn as much to be outdone in courtesy as in bravery."

His

His Lordship was scarcely allowed to conclude, before there was a general cry of—"Hear him! hear the gemman! hear the Duke! Let us hear what Mounsheer has got to say—'tis a long while to night!" with various other polite remarks, but all expressive of their wish to hear what his Grace had to say; none of the lower order being in such a hurry to bring the election to a conclusion, as was the Colonel; who, finding the general voice was against him, retreated, evidently very much mortified: but fearful of opposing the people's inclinations at so critical a moment, he merely said he could not have supposed that any one present could feel himself at all interested in the family history of a total stranger. The multitude convinced him he was mistaken, by calling out for the story he had so foolishly and to so little purpose interrupted.

The Duke once more advanced; and, after returning his thanks for what he

 assured

assured his auditors he considered as a very great compliment, thus went on—

"I have not the honour of being acquainted with the gentleman, whom, it should appear, I have been so unfortunate as to offend; nor did I any more than himself, suppose my family history could prove an interesting relation to every one present; still, as my sister, the late Captain Thomas Ashby's widow, is, more or less, I should presume, known to every one present, and as her son and my nephew was born amongst you, I cannot conceive that I mean to interest your feelings in behalf of strangers:—besides, it absolutely behoves me to make every particular concerning them and myself publicly known, as I am informed that very strange and scandalous reports are in circulation respecting both mother and son."

"Yes, yes, hatched up by our would-be

be Member, Colonel Milford," cried several of the Baronet's party.

The Duke affected not to notice these remarks.

"I believe it is pretty generally understood that my nephew came to England in the quality of extraordinary Ambassador from the Court of Madrid to that of St. James's. Yet I have been told some gentlemen in this town have declared their disbelief of his official as well as hereditary title; and perhaps not without some shadow of reason, since he was born in ——, and till his return amongst you, was generally believed to be the son of the very worthy man who married his mother. Yet I should have supposed, after Lord Stanmore had taken the trouble to explain the seeming mystery to those who avowed such doubts, that they would have suffered themselves to be convinced it was possible that the youth they had formerly

 protected,

protected, was become greatly their superior, instead of purposely blinding themselves against conviction, that they might have an opportunity of vilifying his character in the most unprovoked manner; and as a very strange occurrence has afforded them an opportunity of doing so with impunity, and of even affecting to believe that my nephew has withdrawn himself for fear of detection, it is become highly necessary to make his family story public, that you may all be convinced his late strange and unaccountable disappearance did not originate in those terrors with which you have been assured he must be tormented.

"But before I proceed, suffer me to enquire whether any one present can at all guess whither he is gone?—since neither his mother, nor myself, nor, in short, any of his friends, are at all acquainted with his present place of abode. I must therefore acknowledge that I think he has been

been the dupe, if not the victim, of some base scheme, framed to perplex his friends, and to remove him during the present momentous struggle; and the more I reflect, the more I feel inclined to adopt this opinion. What say you, my friends—am I uncharitable in my surmises?"

A general murmur of some seconds succeeded this question, and many expressive looks of wonder and amaze were exchanged; but no one directly addressing his Grace, he thus continued—

"I will now, in as few words as possible, explain to you, my friends, in what the doubts respecting my nephew's right to his present title, &c. have originated; as I am particularly anxious to convince his fellow-citizens, that wherever he is at this moment, he is one of the first Nobles—nay, subjects in Europe. But to make myself perfectly clear, it is absolutely necessary I should relate some events that

preceded his birth. I have already told you that my late father had only two children—the Mrs. Ashby, whom you have all long known, and the person who now addresses you.

"It would neither amuse nor interest you, were I to enter into a long detail respecting the difference in the Spanish and English laws, manners, and customs; suffice it to say, that in Spain, a father is sole master of his children's destiny, as there is no appeal from his commands, even admitting them to be of the most rigorous nature; but his will is law, and generally irrevocable. In England matters are ordered better, though I must acknowledge I was not always of that opinion; but my nephew has rendered me a convert to his way of thinking. My father, on the contrary, was a rigid adherent to our national customs; and expected—nay, exacted implicit obedience from his children.

"He

"He therefore resolved, long before I was at an age to judge for myself, that I should, with his title, inherit the whole of his immense property; while my less fortunate sister was doomed to a life of seclusion—namely, she was, what in Spain is denominated, dedicated to the service of her God, from the moment she was born; and was in consequence immured, from the time she could speak, in a Monastery of Benedictine Nuns, where she remained till she had attained her sixteenth year; when Chance, or her evil destiny (for dearly has she paid for one imprudent step), brought Don Ferdinand de Gusman, the late Marquis of Almaviva, and third son to the Duke de Medina Sidonia, to the grate of the Convent, to visit his sister, who was, like mine, intended for a Nun.

"The Marquis was also preparing to take holy orders (which in the Catholic religion, you may know, or have heard,

 would

would have condemned him to perpetual celibacy), it being thought very possible —nay, very likely, that a man of his family and pretensions might at some future period fill the Papal chair.

"The Abbess never entertained an idea of his imbibing a passion for my sister; conceiving, we must suppose, that ambition had steeled his heart against love. She therefore afforded them various opportunities of communicating their sentiments to each other, and of lamenting the infatuation of their parents, who had doomed to celibacy two people, who soon conceived that they should prefer the most abject poverty, were their destinies once united, to every luxury Spain produced, if the latter could only be purchased at the expence of their liberty. Yet to propose marrying to his father, and to a woman, who had already taken the white veil, Don Ferdinand knew would never meet the Duke's approbation; but, as if to

to favour the scheme he had in embryo, a Grandee of the first rank made such advantageous proposals for his sister, Donna Maria, that his father altered his intention of devoting her to a cloister, though she was upon the eve of her profession, and consented to accept this Nobleman for his son-in-law.

"For the first time since she entered the Monastery, my sister was permitted to leave it, to assist at her friend's wedding. Such an opportunity was not suffered to escape him by her lover, who, warmly seconded by his sister, prevailed upon her to consent to their being privately united, previous to her returning to her prison, as she now termed her monastic abode, from whence Don Ferdinand had planned every thing for her escape, as soon as he had procured a vessel to convey them to some Protestant country; and having succeeded in the first wish of his heart, he made no doubt

of compassing the second, as he had a sufficiently ample allowance to enable him to offer a tempting bribe to whoever would undertake to waft them to the land of freedom.

"Captain Thomas Ashby, of this port, was at this very time lying in the harbour of Cadiz, near which town, the Convent in which my sister was immured, was situated. To him Don Ferdinand applied, and by degrees put him in his confidence—that is, he informed him that he had very lately privately married, and wished to leave Spain, with his wife, as secretly and as expeditiously as possible; and as he was to be handsomely paid, the Captain very prudently avoided making any enquiries respecting their families, &c. that he might with safety, should any untoward circumstances intervene, plead total ignorance upon those heads; merely making every necessary arrangement, and holding himself in readiness,

diness, according to his agreement, to sail at the appointed time.

"Hitherto Fortune favoured the lovers; my sister made her escape, as had been concerted, very early in the morning, and was received by Captain Ashby himself in his boat, who immediately conveyed her on board his vessel, where she remained concealed till they sailed, which they did in a few hours, it having been settled between the Captain and Don Ferdinand, the tide serving very opportunely, that the former should lie at anchor, at some distance from the harbour, till midnight, or the following morning, if needs must, though his boat was to be sent late in the evening to an appointed place, to fetch his other passenger, who hoped by this manœuvre to elude suspicion.

"Captain Ashby had sailed before my sister's elopement was discovered; but the moment she was missed, my father, who

was then at a Castle he had in those environs, was informed of the circumstance; and his immediate suspicions unfortunately fell upon her husband, knowing him to be in the neighbourhood, which had by no means met his approbation, any more than his former repeated visits at the grate of her Convent. He therefore had him strictly watched from the moment he received the Abbess's message; and it may be supposed that the involuntary agitation which he could not help betraying, much as he endeavoured to be upon his guard, increased my father's surmise that he was concerned in my sister's strange disappearance; and as the time of his departure drew near, the Duke's spies discovered that he had been making various purchases of lady's apparel, which evidently could not be intended for his newly married sister, who was too amply provided, to render such a precaution necessary;—and as people who hire themselves to watch the motions of others, seldom stickle

stickle at any deed likely to further the views of their employer, one of those my father had engaged upon this occasion, even went so far as to peep through the keyhole of the door belonging to Don Ferdinand's apartment, where he perceived him making up a bundle, and loading a pair of pistols, which he deposited in his pockets. This amounting, in the Duke's opinion, to proof positive, he immediately waited upon the Duke de Medina Sidonia (who was at Cadiz with his son-in-law and newly married daughter, who were going out to South America), to inform him of his daughter's elopement, and the suspicions he entertained respecting Don Ferdinand, who was not generally known to be in Cadiz.

"The astonished Duke, who, like the Abbess, had long considered his younger son as the future Pope, had some difficulty to credit my father's assertions; but when

convinced that Don Ferdinand had, unknown to him, left the seminary where he was studying theology previous to his being ordained, he readily consented to his being very strictly watched, vowing if he made an attempt to leave the kingdom, he would deliver him into the hands of the Inquisition. Other spies were in consequence deputed to watch his every step; and these were properly armed, that they might be prepared to act upon the defensive, should they be assailed.

" Thus beset, the unsuspicious Don Ferdinand walked down, soon after dusk, to a private part of the harbour, where Captain Ashby's boat was in waiting to convey him on board his ship; but at the moment he was stepping in, having given his bundle to one of the sailors, his followers, according to the orders they had received, darted forward to prevent him. A violent scuffle ensued, during which

which the unfortunate father of my nephew received a mortal wound, which laid him a corpse at the feet of his pursuers.

"Thus my sister was a widow within three weeks after she became a wife, owing to the mistaken severity of her own and her husband's father; though neither of them had purposed going such an unfortunate length: and in three seconds more, in all likelihood, Don Ferdinand would have been rescued by the brave fellows who were waiting for him in the boat, who sprang on shore, like true British Tars, the moment he seemed likely to be overpowered; but when they found he was past recovery, they prudently consulted their own safety by returning to their boat, and rowing away towards their ship, where, being arrived, they related the melancholy event they had witnessed, to the Captain, who was exceedingly shocked by their intelligence; indeed,

indeed, I have always understood he was as humane as he was brave, and he was besides very much puzzled how to act, since he was more than ever aware of the risk he had incurred by closing with Don Ferdinand's liberal proposals.

"His crew were none of them in the secret, as he had merely informed them that a gentleman and lady wanted to get off privately with some smuggled goods, knowing that they would scorn either to betray him or his passengers. But it was now generally known in Cadiz, for whom he had been waiting; he therefore expected every moment to be pursued and detained, to avoid which, he ordered every sail to be set for England, before he went to break the melancholy tidings to the youthful widow, who, he rather supposed, might wish, under such circumstances, to be relanded in Spain, in which case he was resolved to send her on shore,

shore, at a place he had in view, which he could do, without running any farther risk himself.

"As soon, however, as he conceived himself out of danger of being forced back, he removed her from her place of concealment, into the cabin, which had been engaged by her deceased husband for their accommodation; and there she fully expected to have found the unfortunate Don Ferdinand.

"I should by no means do justice to the scene that followed, were I even to attempt to give you a faint idea of my sister's grief, which she very fully detailed in her first letters to my father and myself; and since my arrival at ———, she has drawn tears into my eyes, by a repetition of what passed between her and her worthy second husband, upon the melancholy occasion.

"In hopes of rendering her grief less poignant, the Captain very considerately offered to send her on shore again. But the bare suggestion roused her to a sense of her own danger, as she was well aware of what would be her fate, should she fall into the hands of the Inquisition, who were very likely to claim her as an apostate daughter of the Church; or, admitting she escaped their merciless fangs, she knew my father's wrath would doom her to take the veil in one of the severest Convents in Spain, as a slight penance for her late imprudence.

"She, therefore, in the most moving terms, requested Captain Ashby would not land her again on her native soil; frankly confessing who she was, and what she had to fear, entering into all those details I have been relating to you. She was addressing a British sailor, and therefore did not sue in vain, much as the Captain was now convinced of what he had risked by

by consenting to favour the flight of the intended fugitives, being well acquainted with the power of our and Don Ferdinand's father. Far, however, from blaming her for having led him into such a dangerous predicament, he swore to protect her even at the hazard of his life, and to consider the confidence she had reposed in him, as sacred; merely observing that he must put his crew upon a wrong scent for her sake.

"They readily believed every thing their Commander chose to tell them respecting his fair passenger, whose mind he endeavoured to divert, by teaching her English; therefore, during a tedious voyage of upwards of two months, she had made great progress in that language, as she particularly wished to be able to make herself understood when she landed, justly considering England as the country she should in future be doomed to inhabit; but, in addition to her other griefs, she

soon

soon found she was with child, which made her fear that the plausible story the Captain meant to report respecting her, would not pass current. She was therefore obliged to impart this additional misfortune to her kind protector; who, having conceived a very tender regard for his pupil, proposed her bearing his name henceforth, and passing for his wife when she landed, admitting she had no objection to their uniting their destinies, as soon as they could do so with propriety, and due regard to secrecy, after her lying-in; promising to prove a kind father to her unborn infant, pointing out how easily his proposed plan might be put into execution, and which would effectually preserve her reputation: because since no one but himself was acquainted with her real story, it would only be giving out that they were married three weeks before they sailed from Cadiz, and he would represent her to be the daughter of a clerk in some of the mercantile houses in that

that city—an assertion even his crew would be unable to contradict, who had been given to understand the deceased Don Ferdinand was the fair fugitive's brother.

"Whether the story Captain Ashby told in consequence of my sister's agreeing to all his plans, was implicitly believed, I cannot pretend to say; but I must suppose they managed matters very dexterously, since my nephew's birth having been made to tally with the supposed date of their marriage, some people present still persist in his being Captain Ashby's son: but after what I have declared respecting his real origin, which I would, if required, affirm upon honour, I trust I have convinced every inhabitant of ———, that he has not a single drop of English blood in his veins, though I have more than once heard him declare that he should glory in having been born a Briton; and, notwithstanding he is now one of the first men in Spain, not only in point of

of birth, but of fortune, I can assure you he has not imbibed any of our narrow prejudices, to which he in a great measure attributes his mother's exile; though he frequently rejoices at having drawn his first breath in this land of liberty, as it has taught him to consider every man of unimpeached character as his equal.

"But I am straying from my subject, from involuntarily feeling myself interested in your present arduous struggle; and I can only hope that your Representatives, whenever chosen, will never give you reason to repent having selected them to preserve your freedom and laws.

"But to return to the birth of my nephew. As soon as my sister (being perfectly recovered from the effects of her confinement upon that occasion), had fulfilled her promised engagements with Captain Ashby, which both gratitude and honour forbade her any longer protracting, she

she wrote an exact statement of every circumstance to her own, and her late husband's father; giving them every necessary information to prove the legitimacy of her son, who had been christened in London, whither she went to unite her destiny to the excellent Captain Ashby—a precaution they had purposely adopted, to enable them to have his names properly registered, in case he should hereafter have any claim upon either of their titles or estates: concluding by requesting forgiveness for herself, but much more particularly their protection for the descendant of both families, who must else be brought up in obscurity, and probably be reduced to the necessity of working for his bread. She also addressed her husband's brothers and myself, the second of whom had paid the debt of nature since her departure from Spain.

"Curiosity induced the two Dukes to read her letters, and then to make various enquiries,

enquiries, which proved, beyond a doubt, the truth of every thing she had advanced; but their pride was too much wounded by her subsequent marriage, to induce them to extend the olive-branch to the suppliant exile. Nor were her future pleadings at all more successful, since they both, of one accord, doomed her to vegetate in the obscure situation they affected to believe she had chosen; and I am sorry that truth obliges me to acknowledge I thought it my duty to follow their unkind example, my father having prohibited my holding any intercourse with a person he considered as an alien to his blood. Besides, he represented to me that any concessions on my part, would appear to be holding out hopes to the fugitive, which neither he nor the Duke de Medina Sidonia ever intended to realize; and the eldest son of that Nobleman set me an example of submission, which I but too readily followed:—indeed, all the relations

relations of the unfortunate couple appeared even anxious to blind themselves to the possibility there existed of this deserted infant one day becoming the sole Representative of the two most illustrious families in Spain.

"Finding it in vain to contend with hereditary pride and national prejudices, my sister ceased to write; and it was supposed, nay possibly hoped, that neither she nor her son had long survived her disgrace; and as I must own I greatly blamed her second marriage, not reflecting that it was the most prudent step she could have taken; and considering her situation, and the intimate connection existing circumstances had forced her to form with Captain Ashby, I was not sorry when she ceased to remind us of her existence. But an all-merciful and just God thought fit to punish us all more or less for our want of natural feeling towards her, who could only be reproached

with imprudence; but such an elopement as her's, though it would have been, considering her age and situation, thought excusable in England, was reckoned an unpardonable crime in Spain.

"I married early, but have never had any children; and Don Ferdinand's elder brother lost his wife and two sons the same year; remaining childless, and not much comforted by the reflection of his unkind treatment of the much-to-be pitied widow of his once favourite relative. Our fathers, ill at ease in their own minds, both, doubtless, considering themselves accessary to the dreadful catastrophe which terminated the existence of the young Marquis of Almaviva, were seldom free from bodily complaints, though too proud to acknowledge themselves in the wrong;—they died without making any disposition, even admitting he was still living, in favour of the son of him, whose death, I am convinced, they both sincerely

sincerely deplored; and I am sorry to say I was then as willing as they had been, to consign him to oblivion, neither enquiring nor caring whether my sister still lived, or in what circumstances.

"The sudden death of my wife led me first to reflect seriously upon the past; but I quieted my conscience by blaming my sister for not having sent her son to Spain; and even considered her not having done so, as a proof that he was no more: besides, I could not very well make any enquiries respecting either, without discovering how much (as I then thought) she had disgraced her family. Whether pride would for ever have steeled my heart against natural affection, I cannot pretend to say; since I was almost involuntarily, and by a mere accident induced to adopt the youth I had hitherto so shamefully abandoned to his destiny.

"Returning from paying a visit of ceremony to a newly-arrived English Ambassador, a youth crossed my passage in the last anti-chamber, whose features instantly reminded me of Don Ferdinand de Guzman. Exceedingly struck by the astonishing resemblance he bore the deceased, I made a sudden and involuntary stop, fixing my eyes full upon him. He blushed at the rude scrutiny I made him undergo; and I was soon at a loss to decide whether he most reminded me of the deceased Marquis Almaviva, or of my still less fortunate sister. I therefore hastily asked him whether he was of English or Spanish extraction.

'Of both, I believe, your Grace,' was his reply; 'for my father was an Englishman, and my mother was born of Spanish parents.'

"I was very nearly exclaiming—'Then you must be my nephew!'—as I knew, from

from my sister's last letters, she intended bringing him up in ignorance of his family, and suffering him, if not claimed by his Spanish relations, to believe himself the son of Captain Ashby. Prudence, however, came in time to my assistance; and though I believe every one present remarked my agitation, I endeavoured to assume an indifferent air, while I enquired his name, and the one his mother bore before she married.—'His own was Ferdinand Ashby; his late father's was Thomas Ashby, a Captain of a vessel belonging to the port of ———, in the employ of Mr. Robert Milford, when he went to the bottom. But he could not satisfy me respecting his mother's maiden name, as he had never heard her talk of her family; he only knew she signed herself Seraphina Ashby.'

"Every doubt respecting our relationship being thus removed from my mind, pride alone prevented me from acknow-

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ledging a menial in the suite of the Ambassador's Secretary, for the nephew of a Grandee of Spain, and the presumptive heir to two Dukedoms;--still I longed to know whether he had any idea of the claim he had to my protection, and what, admitting he had, were his intentions. I therefore asked him several questions, tending to satisfy my curiosity; and was soon convinced that he had been brought up in total ignorance of his father and mother's rank.

"Still his intrepid look, and the ready answers he gave me, prepossessed me so much in his favour, I resolved to become his protector even before I determined to acknowledge our consanguinity. In consequence of this hasty resolve, I told him I had formerly interested myself for some of his mother's family; desiring him to call at my house that evening, having some questions to ask respecting her, which he alone could resolve.

"He

"He seemed both astonished and gratified by the invitation, as I then held the distinguished post I still retain—that of Prime Minister to his Most Catholic Majesty; and promised to attend me at the appointed time: and I returned home to reflect upon this strange rencontre, undecided how to act.

"Before I communicated the discovery I had made, to the Duke de Medina Sidonia, I applied to a friend, who had the regulation of my household, for advice."

"Aye, aye, your Father Confessor, I suppose," said one of Mr. Milford's sailors; "damme, I have been at *Cales!*—so I am up to your gossip.'

'Silence! silence!' exclaimed several others.

"The Duke smiled at the remark; then proceeded—

"I must acknowledge, my friend, you guessed very right:—it was to my Father Confessor I did apply, and he advised my conferring with my nephew's other uncle, before I came to any decision, acknowledging he thought the hitherto neglected youth ought not to be kept a moment longer in ignorance of his birth and expectations; indeed, this worthy man had never approved of the severity that my father, and latterly myself had displayed towards his mother.

"To the Duke de Medina's, however, I hastened. He was, as I have already told you, childless. After expressing his surprise, he agreed that our nephew ought to be immediately removed from his present situation, and taken under our joint care: still he was as averse as myself to making my sister's second marriage public. We therefore agreed, if possible, to detach her son wholly from her, deciding to place him in a Convent of

of Jesuits for his education, the Superior of which we were convinced would, at my request, suppress all his letters to his mother, and prevent any of her's from reaching him: by which means we should be enabled to make each of them believe the other was no more, which we conceived would be the most effectual method we could take to reconcile Ferdinand to Spain, and our controul; though I mentally promised to transmit a sufficient sum to my sister yearly, to prevent her from feeling the pressure of want.

"The Duke accompanied me home, where, at the appointed time, we were joined by my nephew, who readily entered into every detail we were anxious to be made acquainted with, and to whom, in return, we related every particular respecting his father, &c. &c. He appeared far more delighted at the discovery of his rank, upon his mother's account, than

his own, repeating some unguarded expressions she had at times let fall, which had rather led him to suppose she had relations of rank and in affluence; and I own I felt my cheeks glow, when he, with a degree of feeling, that did him the utmost honour, expatiated upon the forlorn state of his beloved parent, whom he represented to be then a dependant upon the bounty of a gentleman of this town, of whom he spoke with rapture; candidly acknowledging that he had left her without leave, for fear she should accede to Mr. Milford's wish, either to take him into his yard, or to send him to sea, or should he, as Mr. Wildham once suggested in his hearing, send him to Spain, in search of those relations he had so unexpectedly found, and to whom he could not resolve to become a burthen, being then unacquainted with their ample means to provide for him. Feeling ourselves more and more attached to him, the

the Duke de Medina and myself resolved to consider him from that moment (which he really was) as our joint heir, and to bring him up suitably to such expectations; but at the same time we determined to avail ourselves of his having left his mother by stealth, to keep her in ignorance of his destiny, and thus save ourselves the mortification of acknowledging she had taken the only means of repairing her first imprudence.

"We therefore took upon ourselves to account to the gentleman who had brought him over, for his not returning home again; and placed him that very evening under the care of our friend, the Principal of the Jesuits College, who was, without letting the youth suspect his design, to intercept all his letters addressed to England.

"Having so far succeeded to our wishes, we told the English Secretary a very plausible story respecting his late servant, which

perfectly reconciled him to his loss. To our Monarch I was more unreserved; and with his permission, Ferdinand assumed his late father's title, and was nominated a Cadet in the Walloon Guards.

"His letters to his mother were, according to my desire, brought to me; and though the contents greatly raised him in my esteem, I made no scruple, after having read them, of committing them to the flames, though I often took myself to task for the cruel deception I was planning; but pride silenced all my scruples: and as my sister continued in absolute ignorance respecting her son, she never addressed him. Meanwhile, he made very great progress in the Spanish language; and soon, to our infinite surprise, convinced both his masters and myself that he had already received a very excellent education, and was perfectly master of the dead languages; and I thus publicly return my thanks to the gentleman then

at

at the head of the grammar-school in this town, who, I am informed, is still living (and very likely among the listeners to my tale), for the great pains he took with a youth, who had only his natural parts to recommend him to his notice. Nor am I less grateful to Mr. Milford for having enabled him to profit by such instructions.

"But to resume my story.—Not having received any answer to several letters he had addressed to his mother, my nephew began to grow uneasy, when, by way of weaning his mind entirely from England, with well-affected sorrow, I told him his mother had paid the debt of nature. But I was almost immediately punished for my shameful dereliction from truth; for the amiable boy conceiving that his having left her so secretly had occasioned her death, was not only inconsolable for her loss, but fretted himself into a fever, which had nearly terminated

 his

his existence, and rendered me completely miserable. Twenty times was I tempted to acknowledge the shameful deception I had put upon him; but the fear of rendering myself odious in his eyes closed my lips: besides, I thought it by no means unlikely that my sister might not have long survived his departure, though, contrary to my first intention, I had made no enquiries about her, nor had I transmitted her any money; the Duke de Medina having observed to me, that such a measure would only furnish her with the means to discover her son.

"I therefore endeavoured to persuade myself that the fiction with which I deceived my nephew, was matter of fact; thus attempting to banish her from my memory.

"Ferdinand's convalescence was slow and uncertain. The physicians feared a decline. I therefore, by way of accele-

rating

rating his recovery, seized the opportunity of having nominated one of my most particular friends, Governor of Mexico, to send him to South America with that gentleman, contenting myself with exacting his word of honour that he would neither, directly nor indirectly, correspond with either Mr. Wildham or Catherine Ashby, for whom I had rather equivocally promised to provide.

"He merely considered my restrictions as a proof of my regard, presuming that I feared such a correspondence would greatly contribute to increase his sorrow for the supposed loss of her whom he so sincerely deplored, as in every other respect I proved myself worthy the affection he felt for me; indeed, I was determined to promote his interest to the utmost of my power, which was, you may suppose, nearly unlimited.

"Not-

"Notwithstanding his youth, therefore, he was soon raised to the command of a regiment; and as his birth and expectations were now generally known, he was soon considered as second in command in that part of the Spanish dominions; and I supplied him with the means of outvying all his brother officers in splendour, though I persevered in keeping the Atlantic between us, as I could not help fearing that, should I allow him to return to Spain, he would by some accident discover how grossly I had imposed upon his credulity, which must lower me considerably in his opinion, if it did not eventually render me the object of his hatred.

"It may therefore be supposed how delighted I was when my friend wrote me word that my nephew was upon the point of marriage with the daughter of one of the richest and first men upon that part of the Continent—a descendant in

in a direct line from their ancient Monarchs, which had induced him to consider himself as my representative upon the occasion, by sanctioning the wishes of the young couple, knowing that many a Sovereign Prince would not have disdained such a match.

"Of course I could but applaud what he had done, though I was well convinced that my nephew had merely contracted this engagement, to render himself absolutely independent, in which he perfectly succeeded, having, by his marriage, become one of the richest subjects, perhaps, in all Europe.

"Policy, as well as the sincere affection I bore him, would therefore have prevented me from disapproving of such a connection, had I not been, as I sincerely was, rejoiced at his having thus in a manner fixed himself, at least for some years longer, in what we term the New World,

World, where I conceived it very improbable that he would ever obtain any intelligence respecting his mother, except through my means, as I thought it very likely he might not return to Spain till my death recalled him thither, to take possession of my title and estates.

"Meanwhile, both the Duke of Medina and myself evinced our approbation of his choice of a wife, by settlirg a part of our landed property upon him; and I obtained the permission of our Sovereign to decorate him with various superior Orders of Knighthood—indeed, it was our sole study to render him an object of general envy.

"About two years since, my friend, with whom he had gone out, solicited his recall; and so anxious was the Duke de Medina to see his nephew, that he succeeded him as Governor: and never was I more flattered than by the first letter I received from him, in which he assured

me

me that our future Representative surpassed his most sanguine hopes, and was the idol of his friends and acquaintance. I therefore resolved to request he would pay me a short visit, no longer apprehending his making any enquiries respecting my sister. To the joint mortification of his other uncle and myself, he had no children; and his wife was in a very indifferent state of health when presented to the Duke de Medina. This I the less regretted, as I thought, in the event of her death, he would most likely return for a short time to Europe, where I flattered myself he would soon make a second choice; and in less than four months after the Duke's arrival in Mexico, she paid the debt we all owe our Creator.

"Still my nephew had made himself so many friends, they all opposed his intention of revisiting the Old World, particularly his father-in-law, who could hardly bear to lose sight of him, and from whom

he

he had still considerable expectations. But this worthy man did not long survive his daughter; and soon after his death, wishing to oblige me, my nephew (having received his uncle, the Governor's, leave of absence, being at this time second in authority to him only in Mexico), resolved to pay me a visit; and about five months ago, I had the supreme pleasure of once more folding him in my arms. His joy appeared to equal mine; but having given way to our mutual transports, he very naturally reverted to the past, anxiously enquiring whether Catherine Ashby, or his mother's kind benefactor, Mr. Wildham, was still living, and when I had heard from, or of them?

"I had long since sincerely repented of my conduct towards my sister, though I had not come to any decision how best to repair the injuries I had done her, since it was certainly unpardonable to have kept her so long in a state of ignorance respecting

respecting her son, who not only possessed the means, but the will to render her completely independent.

"My confusion, the natural effect of my guilt and compunction, when he made these very simple and proper enquiries, appeared to astonish him. He questioned me more minutely; and my very incoherent answers led him to suspect the real truth. Regarding me for some seconds with the greatest anxiety, he exclaimed—

'Am I so fortunate as to have been misled respecting my mother's demise?'

"I could not immediately make any reply; and he thus continued—

'I dared not ask you many questions, my dear uncle, when you, undoubtedly for very good reasons, told me she was no more, though I had my doubts at the time. But as you suffered me to remain

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in my error, after a time, they gave way to the melancholy certainty that I had shortened her days by the ungrateful mistaken step I had taken, which idea has imbittered my happiest moments; but your countenance, Sir, leads me to hope ——'

"I would not suffer the noble fellow to proceed, but instantly confessed how basely I had deceived him, with every why and wherefore: when, instead of reproaching me, though I perceived he was very much hurt, he endeavoured to find excuses for my conduct, and to reconcile me to myself, assuring me that he sincerely forgave me, though he acknowledged he feared that, should Mr. Wildham have paid the debt of nature, his mother might have been reduced to her former state of poverty:—in short, he reasoned so ably and so feelingly, he rendered me an absolute convert to his way of thinking, and made me anxious to be

reconciled

reconciled to my much-wronged sister, whom he resolved immediately to visit, that he might endeavour to repair the consequences of my shameful neglect; and by way of evincing how sincerely I repented of my past conduct towards her, I resolved to accompany him, to confess my unkindness to his injured mother.

"But before this arrangement was finally settled, as my nephew had a great many affairs to arrange in Spain, before he could set out for England, it became necessary to send an extraordinary Ambassador to the Court of Great Britain; and as the nomination was left to me, I immediately fixed upon my nephew, who very joyfully availed himself of the opportunity: and as the business which made it necessary to send him over, prevented me from accompanying him, I could only write to my sister, perfectly exculpating my nephew from having wilfully neglected her, by honestly confessing my own errors.

"He

"He therefore departed, provided with letters of recommendation to many of the first Nobility, and in particular to the Prime Minister, to whom I thought it necessary candidly to explain every circumstance respecting his birth. You will therefore no longer wonder at my sister's having received him so kindly, since, far from having been deficient in filial affection, the supposed loss of her had nearly cost him his life.

"He had not, however, been gone more than a fortnight, when letters came to me from Mexico, informing me of the death of his uncle, the then Governor, who had taken a cold on the very day my nephew sailed for Europe, which terminated his existence in the short space of a week.

"My nephew being his sole heir, I had it in contemplation to dispatch an express to him, to hasten his return, when

when our most gracious Monarch induced me to come in search of him myself, having, the moment he learned the death of his uncle, appointed him his successor, hinting that I ought to seize the opportunity of paying my sister a visit. So kind a wish, delivered too at the moment when he had rendered my nephew second in power only to himself, was not to be disregarded.

"I therefore almost immediately set out for Great Britain, where I find my nephew has acquitted himself very honourably and ably in his official character; and if I may believe the representations of his kind friends now present, he has neither disgraced his rank nor his pretensions during his stay here, though he wished to have remained *incognito*. It now, therefore, only remains to enquire where he can be at this moment; If any one present can resolve this very simple

 question,

question, I promise instantly to reward him with ten thousand pounds English!"

His Grace paused, and looked round him with the greatest anxiety. His munificent offer occasioned several loud murmurs, and a great deal of whispering; but no one stepped forward to put his generosity to the test. He therefore sighed, as he ceased to hope, exclaiming—

"Wonderful! I am really astonished at so general a silence! Surely he cannot have vanished! Yet you must all agree it is very surprising he should have thus absconded, after his honour stood pledged to assist the candidates he favoured to the utmost of his power; as I trust I have succeeded in convincing you all, that he could not be actuated by any of those fears to which some gentlemen have not scrupled to attribute his extraordinary disappearance: besides, his presence is par-

ticularly required in London, to put the finishing stroke to the business which brought him over. Therefore, I am well convinced he has not voluntarily withdrawn himself from his mother and friends.

"However, woe be to those concerned in the business, if any unfair means have been resorted to, for the purpose of gratifying private pique; because, if the trifling sum I have already offered, is insufficient to gratify the avarice of those employed, why, I will treble it, and then double that, but I will search to the bottom of this hitherto impenetrable mystery;—nay, I mean immediately to make it a national concern, because, had any accident befallen him, some traces would have remained, to have led to a discovery. It therefore appears to amount to a certainty in my opinion, that he has become the victim of some private treacherous enemy; though what was their scheme, or how they were enabled to compass their base

base designs, none of his friends can pretend to divine.

"But I will not trespass upon your time any longer at so critical a juncture, as I am conscious I am interrupting public business. I can therefore only declare, that if the Marquis Almaviva, now Duke de Medina Sidonia, is not forthcoming by sunset this evening, I will take the most effectual means that can be devised, for bringing every one at all concerned in his extraordinary disappearance, to condign punishment: though I repeat, that if any one now, or between this and sunset, can bring me any intelligence respecting him, or tending to lead to a discovery of his retreat, I will instantly pledge my word to put them in almost immediate possession of double the sum I first offered, namely, twenty thousand pounds; and I believe my friend, the Marquis of Stanmore, will be answerable for my being able to keep my promise."

That

That Nobleman instantly stepped forward, as well as Sir Henry and Mr. Fenwick, who all declared themselves ready to answer any demands of the Duke de L'Infantado's, even to thrice the amount of the promised reward; declaring, all three, that they were resolved to make a very handsome addition to the already tempting bribe, if any one came forward authorized to claim it, by giving sufficient information respecting the Duke de Medina, to enable his friends to bring his enemies to justice.

END OF VOL. II.

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